

\$2.00

NO 27

45p

THE COMICS
NEWS FANZINE

BEM

**SEZ
DEZ**



**THE HOUSE OF
HAMMER**

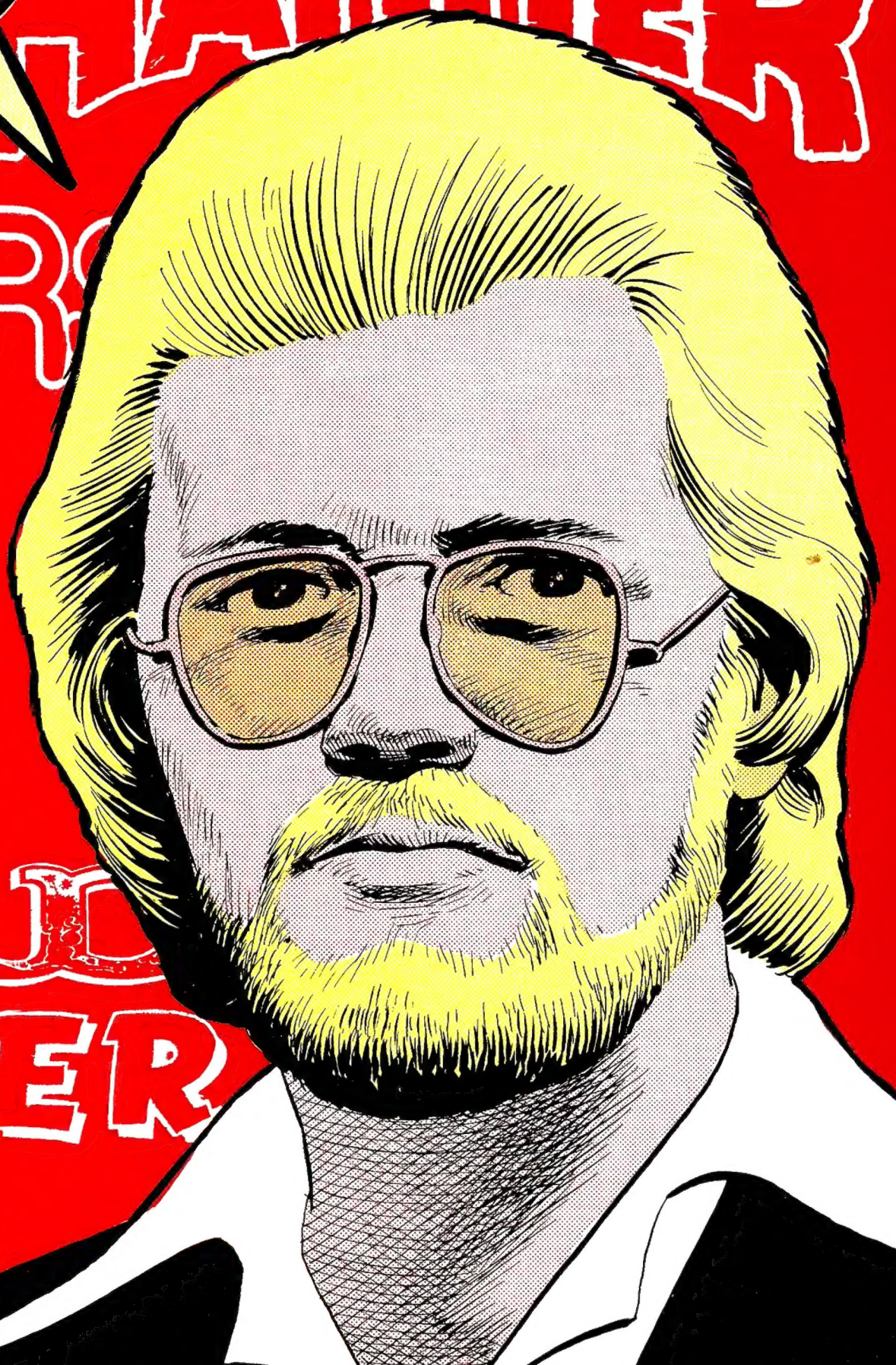
STARBURST

**FANTASY
ADVERTISER**

EUREKA

**MAN
BUSTER**

WARRIOR



heroic tales of swords and sorcery

NEWS AT BEM

BEM-27 March 1980

editor & publisher: Martin Lock
consulting editor: Mike Cruden

One of these days, I'm going to be able to fit everything into Bem that I want to; not this time, I'm afraid. We're without Sigh because K. Williams didn't write one, and Catholicity is missing because Kath has written an article instead--it will be in Bem-28, complete with a cover by two artists no strangers to Bem. Unamerican Activities has been held over, too, as it seemed better to print the interview with Richard Marshall right away; it's on page 35, and Howard Leroy Davis promises a further instalment next time.

The main feature this issue is a long interview with Dez Skinn, for which Dave Gibbons kindly provided our cover. Dez has promised to let us have the answers to any other questions the interview raises, or that Adam Pirani didn't ask--so if you have any questions, let me know by early March. Questions on how one gets a job in comics, perhaps?

Besides Dez and Dave, the other two main benefactors of Bem-27 are Phil Clarke and Colin Bayley; Phil runs Birmingham's comprehensive and friendly comics shop Nostalgia and Comics (14-16 Smallbrook Queensway, Birmingham 5, which isn't far from the central New Street station--or phone 021-643 0143 for details), and he is sponsoring our beautiful centre-spread by half the printing costs, plus the fairly hefty charges for photographic reduction. Which other fanzine ever had such a vast number of pro artists contributing? The original was put together by Colin Bayley, who works upstairs in Nostalgia & Comics among their huge stock of back issues, at three 1979 conventions in Britain and America--and he's entrusted it to me for long enough to get it printed as a rather special "pull-out poster"! Phil and Colin, many thanks...

Reviews for the next Bem scene should reach me between the 8th and 15th of March, and letters as usual as soon as possible. Bem-28 will be mailed out in late April. -Martin



To start off this long-running review-cum-recommendation column, we've got some March cover-dated Marvels. And it's interesting that, although they're all advance import copies, only 60% have the diamond-shape price tag -- the others have slipped through with the traditional shape of box.

DAREDEVIL #163, after January's fill-in by Fleisher & Ditko, is "Blind Alley", by Roger McKenzie, Frank Miller, Josef Rubinstein, & Klaus Janson; it's good. Seldom has the Hulk been handled so well -- and when he leaves, will hornhead ever be the same again?

FANTASY MASTERPIECES #4 is a 75 cent, 48-page comic, reprinting 36 of the 39 pages of the lead story from SILVER SURFER #4 (pages 12, 22 & 29 are missing--annoying, when two house ads are included); either they're using poor copies of the original art, or today's printing is terrible, as the thickening and the blurring of the original art is ghastly when one compares the two comics.

KING CONAN #1 is the other 75 cent comic of the month, with 36 pages of "Witch of the Mists", by Roy Thomas, Big John Buscema, and Ernie Chan. I must say that Conan is remarkably young-looking here, considering that he now has a 12-year-old son called Conn--but I wish the comic well, it would be good to see more regular titles in this format.

ROM #4 seems to be developing nicely, from Bill Mantlo and Sal Buscema, who is proving that he can do interesting art without a "pretty" inker. It's still early days of course, but it looks to me as if Bill and Sal have got a good series going here!

MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #61 co-stars Starhawk in the first part of a trilogy by Mark Gruenwald, Jerry Bingham & Gene Day featuring "The Coming of Her", from the cocoon vacated many years ago by Him, later known as Warlock. An intriguing start--nice art--worth reading.

And as a last Marvel, need I say that in X-MEN #131, "Run For Your Life", messrs Chris Claremont, John Byrne and Terry Austin have put together something pretty darn good. The dark side of Phoenix... Kitty Pryde in action... and plenty of X-citement. I can hardly wait for next month...

SUPER-STAR HOLIDAY SPECIAL, dated Spring or April, alias DC Special Series #21, has

new Jonah Hex (Fleisher/Ayers/Tanghal), The Batman (O'Neil/Miller/Mitchell), House of Mystery (Rozakis/Tanghal/Adkins), Sgt Rock (Kanigher/Ayers/Tanghal), & Legion (Levitz/Garcia Lopez/Giordano) stories -- now that's what I call an anthology! There's some good art here, too, especially by Frank Miller and José Luis Garcia Lopez.

WEIRD WAR #85 has a 22-page story: "The War On The Edge of Reality" by J.M. DeMatteis & Tenny Henson. It's truly weird, involving monsters and alternate realities, and makes a good change of pace--it's a touch episodic and complex, but fun. SGT ROCK #338 has an sf-type back-up by Bill Kelley & Rick Veitch which will appeal to Time Warp readers; and WONDER WOMAN #265, after a 12-page "untold tale of Wonder Woman's days with NASA" which involves a "lost world" of dinosaurs and

aliens, contains a 5-page tale for Teen Titans fans -- "Mr Jupiter is Dead", starring Donna (Wonder Girl) Troy, by Bridwell, Estrada & Calnan.

BATMAN #321 has quite a tempting title: "Dreadful Birthday, Dear Joker", by Len Wein, Walt Simonson & Dick Giordano. It seems a touch gadget-conscious, but the art (all 18 pages) is fine. BRAVE & BOLD 160 gives Jim Aparo the chance to draw Supergirl as the guest-star (written by Cary Burkett), and a good job he does; while, to return the compliment, Supergirl's cousin has as his guest in DC COMICS

PRESENTS #19 (by O'Neil, Staton & Chiaramonte) the dominoed dardoll, and all-around flame-haired woman of the shadows, Batgirl.

In FLASH #283, Flash finally learns who really killed his wife, and naturally enough proceeds to pound his head into the floor; while in THE NEW ADVENTURES OF SUPERBOY #3, the teen of steel is outfought by a man from 1980 possessing his own body of about fifteen years earlier. Times is tough all over...

And that's all for now; as a brief addition to the editorial, may I just say that the "Bem Ballot", for people to vote for their favourite contributors to Bem and fans and fanzines generally, has been distributed to UK subscribers with this Bem; if anyone else wants one, or an Eagle Award form, just send us the traditional stamped, self-addressed envelope, okay?

-Martin Lock



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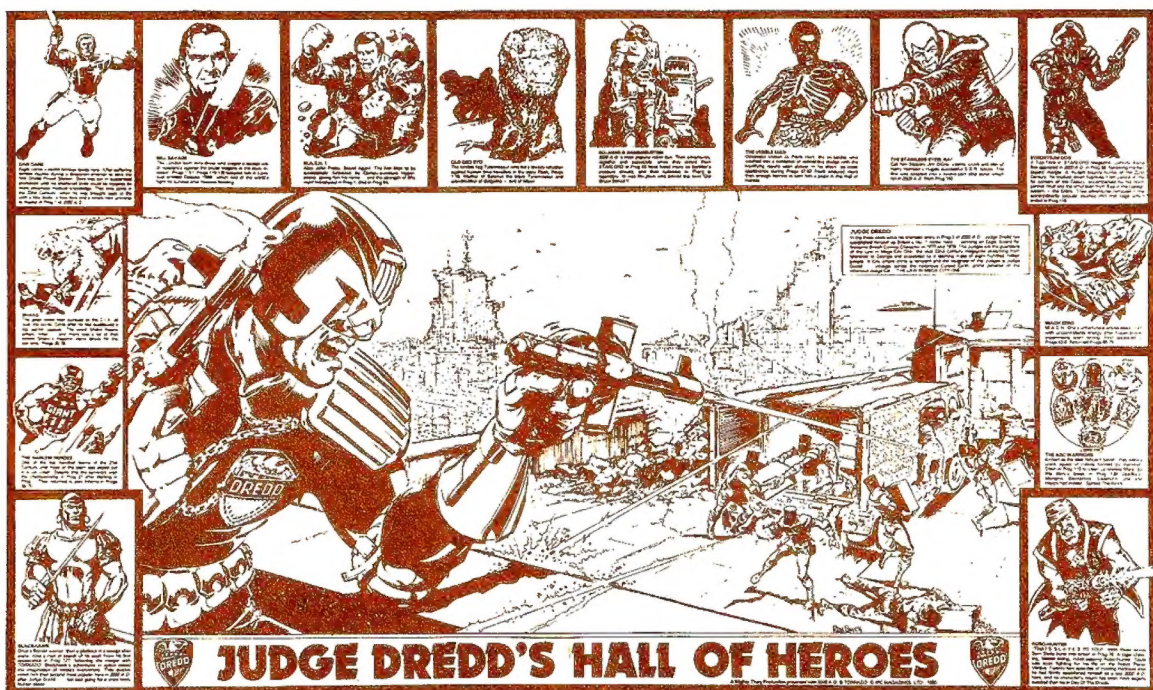
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2000 A.D. prog 152 is a "boom" issue-- it features the return of Robo-Hunter, the start of a 3-part Judge Dredd tale written by Pat Mills about what happens when a man drinks the blood of Satanus, and the debut of "Fiends of the Eastern Front", replacing the Stainless Steel Rat for ten issues. Art on this is by Ezquerro -- not a series on "the horrors of war", but on "the war of horrors". A poster made up from 4 centre-spreads begins that week too--swivel your eyes to the right--with new art on Judge Dredd by Ron Smith, and pictures from the past around the edges. And on the back cover a series on the "Top Ten Sci-Fi Movies" begins (although if an advertiser books the back cover, it can be moved inside and still be printed in colour); it will spotlight Metropolis, Things to Come, The Thing, The Day The Earth Stood Still, When Worlds Collide, Them, The Invasion of the Body Snatchers, 2001, Dark Star, and Star Wars.

Prog 156 celebrates the comic's third birthday; Judge Dredd moves to the colour centre-spread, and begins a serial which should run to about 20 episodes. The art for "The Judge Child" will be shared between Brian Bolland (who drew part one), Mike McMahon, and Ron Smith. A four-part Captain Kleo escapee written by Kev F. Sutherland begins then too, drawn by Robin Smith. And prog 157 has a 3-page Ro-Jaws roo-tale with art by Dave Gibbons.

Prog 161 sees the end of "Fiends of the Eastern Front", "Blackhawk", and the SF movies feature--so 162 is another "boom" issue. The Stainless Steel Rat returns in an adaptation of "The Stainless Steel Rat Saves The World", Alvin Gaunt is working on a new hero strip, and for the back cover "The 7 Wonders of the Galaxy" by Kev O'Neill begins. Kev has only sold IPC the first publication rights to this.

Judge Dredd remains 2000 A.D.'s most popular feature, followed by Slippery Jim diGriz, Blackhawk, the VCs, and Captain Kleo. As its episodes are shorter than originally planned, the VCs will last for approximately 30 episodes in all.



The Judge Dredd album mentioned last time has been postponed. But on February 8th appears "The 2000 A.D. Space Quiz Book", compiled by Roy Preston for Mirror Books, price 65p. Cover by Dave Gibbons. Oh, and prog 155 includes "Tharg, This Is Your Life", a 5-pager drawn by Ezquerro and written by *Tharg* himself.

IPC are launching a new weekly similar to TIGER on February 18th...SPEED. That day also sees the hardback "Asterix in Corsica", at £2.25 from Hodder & Stoughton, released, in date order #20 in the series.

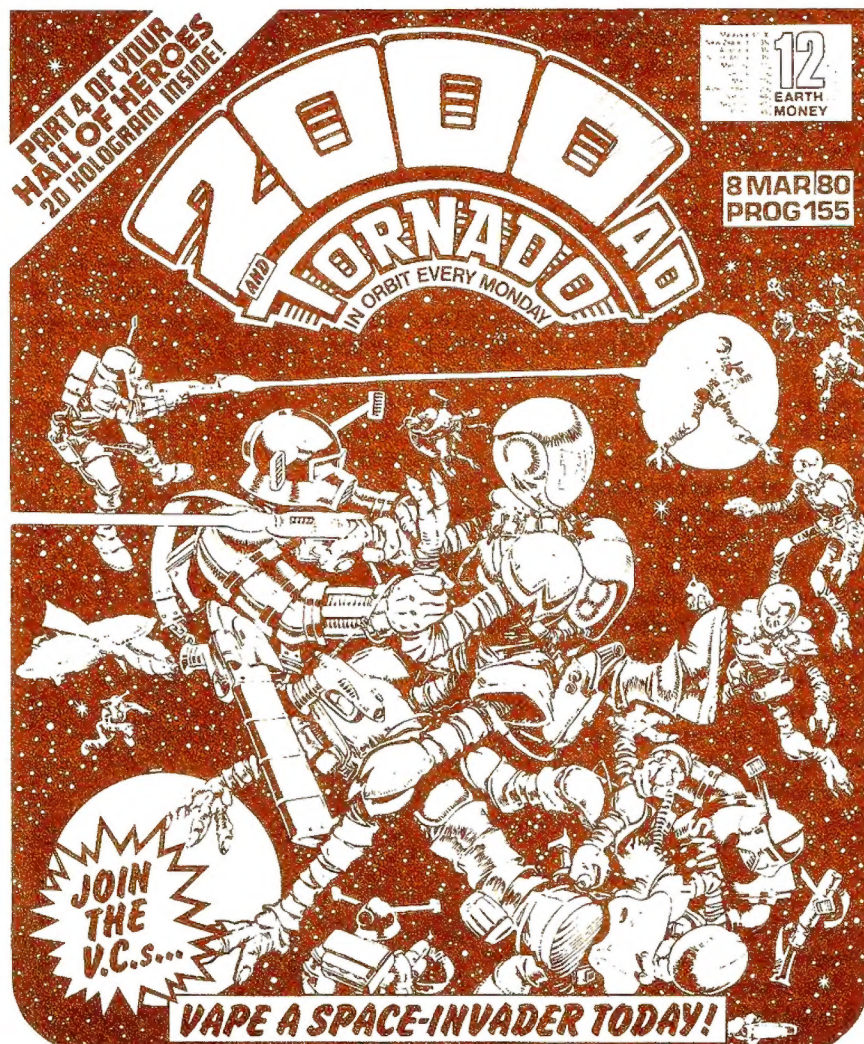
Richard Burton, besides assisting Ro-Jaws with his film reviews, is editing the LION SUMMER SPECIAL 1980. The cover will be by Garry Leach, and a new story, hopefully drawn by Dave Harwood, teams up The Spider and Robot Archie for the first time. Also included will be a new Captain Condor text story by the original writer of the series, Frank Pepper--it should be illustrated by Garry Leach. Richard has also scripted a Blackhawk story for the next TORNADO annual.

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A German edition of HEAVY METAL/METAL HURLANT is launched this month, under the rather obvious title of SCHWERMETAL. It will be published by Volks Verlag, who've done mainly books in the past. It will also feature work from Holland's GUMMI and American groundlevel or underground books.

STARBLAZES is to be a new USA magazine to compete with HEAVY METAL. It will be released by the book publishers who did Mike Whelan's WONDERWORKS book (a lovely package), and contain work by Wally Wood, Arthur Suydam, and John Workman, amongst others; Bill DuBay will write some of the stories. With DuBay's position at Warren and Workman's at HEAVY METAL itself, one wonders how these things come about.

Mike Friedrich's IMAGINE has been suspended while it is transferred to another publisher. Mike will continue producing and packaging the title, but the format will be a lot thicker, to hit the mainstream market. These last three items of international news come from Mal Burns, whose own column is on page 33...



DC Comics are expanding their entire line of 32-page monthly comics. Beginning with the September-dated issues, on sale in June, each comic will contain 25 pages of all-new story and art, for 50 cents each. This extra eight pages will be found by cutting down on the number of house ads (approximately 5 pages at present) and also the paying advertisements. This monumental change will make for many differences in the current run of comics --at this point, the creative teams for the new features are not officially set, but for the most part the features themselves are. The Dollar Comics will remain unchanged.

ADAM STRANGE will be the regular second feature in GREEN LANTERN. The old TALES OF THE GREEN LANTERN CORPS and ORIGINAL GL features will be incorporated into the regular lead stories. LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES will normally carry full-length LSH stories, with solo back-ups of the individual members every so often. AQUAMAN is leaving WORLD'S FINEST --his place will be filled by new RED TORNADO solo stories.

And Len Wein welcomes AQUAMAN to join PLASTIC MAN and STARMAN in the new ADVENTURE COMICS. FIRESTORM is to be the second feature in FLASH, and THE HUNTRESS finds a new home as the back-up in WONDER WOMAN.

ENEMY ACE and DATELINE: FRONTLINE will appear in UNKNOWN SOLDIER. I, VAMPIRE will be the special feature in HOUSE OF MYSTERY, while THE WAR THAT TIME FORGOT and CREATURE COMMANDOS will appear in WEIRD WAR.

The JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA is to feature 25-page adventures.

WEIRD WESTERN TALES is cancelled with issue #70, but SCALPHUNTER is to continue as the second feature in JONAH HEX. Editor Ross Andru is developing a new Western comic to fill the gap in his schedule.

TEEN TITANS are returning in a book all their own, edited by Len Wein and written by Marv Wolfman. Strangely, this feature was the first DC superhero book that Len & Marv worked on, many years ago.

George Perez is doing the cover for GREEN LANTERN #132. It will be inked by Dick Giordano. And Terry Austin has inked a story for TIME WARP, written by J.M. DeMatteis and pencilled by Alan Weiss.

Marv Wolfman is resurrecting (in a World War II setting) BLACKHAWK for the back of one of the war books --Dave Cockrum might possibly be the artist.

BLUE RIBBON DIGEST #2 will star THE FLASH; #3 will probably feature GREEN LANTERN.

THE LEGEND OF THE BATMAN 3-part series is to be published in April, May & June. As Len Wein was late in handing in the scripts, John Byrne was able to pencil only the first issue; it has been inked by Aparo, who is pencilling and inking the other two issues. Because of this, the art line-up on BRAVE & BOLD has been changed; #163 (Black Lightning, scripted by Paul Kupperberg) & #166 (Zatanna, scripted by Mike W. Barr) will be drawn by Dick Giordano, Don Newton has drawn #165 (Man-Bat, by

Marty Pasko), and J.L. Garcia Lopez has been given #165 (Hawkman, scripted by DeMatteis).

There will be a BATMAN adventure crossing over from his own book into BRAVE & BOLD, where the co-star will be THE DEMON, written by Marv Wolfman and drawn by Jim Starlin. It involves The Batman's journey to England, where he encounters the Arthurian legends.

The same creative team are doing DC COMICS PRESENTS #25, which has the first repeat of a co-star (barring continued stories) for Superman--Green Lantern. #26, written by Paul Levitz, co-stars Phantom Stranger and wraps up the Pete Ross sub-plot from DCCP #13.



Julie Schwartz has planned WORLD OF KRYPTON as a back-up feature for SUPERMAN, with also occasional extra SUPERMAN stories. ATOM and AIR WAVE will rotate (and occasionally team up) in the second feature in ACTION COMICS. "WHATEVER HAPPENED TO..." will run in the back of DC COMICS PRESENTS, revealing the fates of old characters no longer appearing regularly. THE WONDER TWINS will have their own solo stories in SUPER-FRIENDS, but some solo adventures of the foreign superheroes E. Nelson Bridwell has created for the book, such as JACK-O-LANTERN, will also appear.

There will be additional SUPERBOY tales in the back of the NEW ADVENTURES OF SUPERBOY, plus a solo KRYPTO story now and then.

Paul Levitz is planning BATMAN & ROBIN as the second feature in BATMAN, and to set this series up, there will be some startling changes in Robin's DETECTIVE COMICS feature, as written by Jack C. Harris. THE IMMORTAL MAN (a new character, not to be confused with the hero who appeared in STRANGE ADVENTURES) will appear in THE BRAVE & THE BOLD.

Jack C. Harris is including regular character features in his mystery books; DR 13--THE GHOST BREAKER will appear in GHOSTS, JOHNNY PERIL will be in UNEXPECTED, & a new feature is being developed for SECRETS OF HAUNTED HOUSE.

Three OMAC adventures done by Jim Starlin will appear in the back of THE WARLORD. After these, Mike Grell's THE WIZARD WORLD will become the regular feature, with also occasional full-length WARLORD stories.



Len Wein and Jim Starlin are doing a 3-part tale for DC COMICS PRESENTS featuring J'onn J'onzz, Manhunter from Mars in part one, Supergirl in part two, and The Spectre in part three.

Bouncing Boy & Duo Damsel return in LEGION OF SUPERHEROES #266 in a story plotted by Gerry Conway. J.M. DeMatteis will dialogue LSH #265 over a Conway plot. Jimmy James & Dave Hunt drew both issues.

And the reason Gerry didn't do the full scripting then was to give himself time to adjust to the birth of his daughter Cara. His wife, Carla, is doing fine, we hear!

Wally Wood has returned to do some work for DC, and will be inking WONDER WOMAN #269 over José Delbo's pencils, as well as drawing the cover for a TIME WARP which will have a story written to fit it. -TCR

THE DOLPHIN (the heroine of SHOWCASE #79, all those years ago) will return soon in an AQUAMAN story, written by Bob Rozakis. In a future issue of SUPERMAN FAMILY, SUPERGIRL is to meet "herself" as she first appeared on this planet; only THIS Supergirl is "The Supergirl From Planet Earth!"

Mike Barr, George Tuska and Bob Smith did the JOHNNY PERIL adventure for the 200th issue of THE UNEXPECTED, which features a cover by Keluta. -TCR

Brian Bolland, who did the cover to GREEN LANTERN #127, is doing covers for #130 and #131 as well. He may also be drawing a story for TIME WARP.

The Batman movie is still under negotiation; a budget of \$15 million is planned.

Like DC, Marvel are considering increasing the number of story pages in their standard line of comics; however, as they carry less home ads than DC, this cannot be done in the 32-page format. As Marvel have been conducting a heavy campaign to gather more advertising, the speculation is that Marvel will add an extra 16-page signature, part of which will be extra ads, and part extra story. It is not yet clear what story length Marvel will go for, or whether the comics will sell at fifty or sixty cents, but a number of Marvel employees have been told to gear up for an increase in the pagecount. An added impetus is coming



Louise Jones, formerly editor of the Warren magazines, has been named an editor at Marvel, with Danny Fingeroth as her assistant. No books have yet been assigned to her. Denny O'Neil is the STAR TREK editor; and Jo Duffy will be editing the non-Goodwin issues of STAR WARS. -TCR/ML

Mike Golden is drawing the 1980 MICRONAUTS ANNUAL. Armando Gil will become permanent inker of the regular MICRONAUTS book when Pat Broderick takes over. -TCR

A Chris Claremont-Mike Vosburg JOHN CARTER ANNUAL story will turn up as a STAR WARS story. In fact, the current STAR WARS ANNUAL is probably it...

Wally Wood is inking the Frank Miller cover for DAREDEVIL #164. Mike Golden is doing a fill-in issue of POWER MAN. Iron Man will guest-star in SHE-HULK #6. Bill Sienkiewicz is drawing an issue of FANTASTIC FOUR. -TCR

In March, Marvel will release the first of four quarterly newspaper supplements--16-page comic books, with 4-page cover, containing about 7 pages of paid ads and one or two public service ads and short display ads. Initially, this supplement--billed as an advertising supplement--will be run in 8 U.S. papers in the largest markets: New York, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, Washington, Houston, Dallas and Philadelphia. That'll give a circulation of about seven million; and Marvel hopes to go weekly sometime in 1981, if they get the necessary support from advertisers--each page will cost about \$50,000. Spider-Man & Hulk are likely to be featured, if they can avoid any contractual problems caused by the newspaper strips.

THE DAZZLER is out of MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL; evidently the art didn't interpret the plot properly, and the script wasn't on the mark. However, Casablanca Records have approached Bo Derek to play the character in a film project, and Marvel have scheduled it as a 40 cent monthly title, with the first issue due to appear with an August cover-date.

Dez Skinn is leaving his current position at Marvel Britain; I spoke to him on the phone and he seemed relaxed and confident about this latest step in his career. He will no longer be responsible for the day-to-day running of the established line, which will be in the hands of Paul Neary and Alan McKenzie; he'll be creatively involved in the licensing of Marvel products in this country, and Marvel Britain's material abroad, plus promotion of Marvel's image -- and Marvel will have first refusal on Dez's new ideas.

Besides being paid a retainer by Marvel for his services and developing new ideas, Dez



from the 1979 sales returns; both Marvel and DC have been selling very well... -TCR/M

Marvel is strongly committed to doing some form of alternative publishing, to be marketed through the collector's stores. Right now, this is likely to follow the format of the "Asterix" albums, with 48 pages and a price of between \$3 and \$6. A special Claremont & Byrne X-MEN album is almost certain, inked of course by Terry Austin; the PRISONER stories completed by Kirby and Englehart & Kane should also appear in this format, while a DAREDEVIL & DR STRANGE book by Roger McKenzie & Frank Miller, and an AVENGERS book by David Michelinie & George Perez, are also being talked about, as is a possible SPIDER-MAN volume.

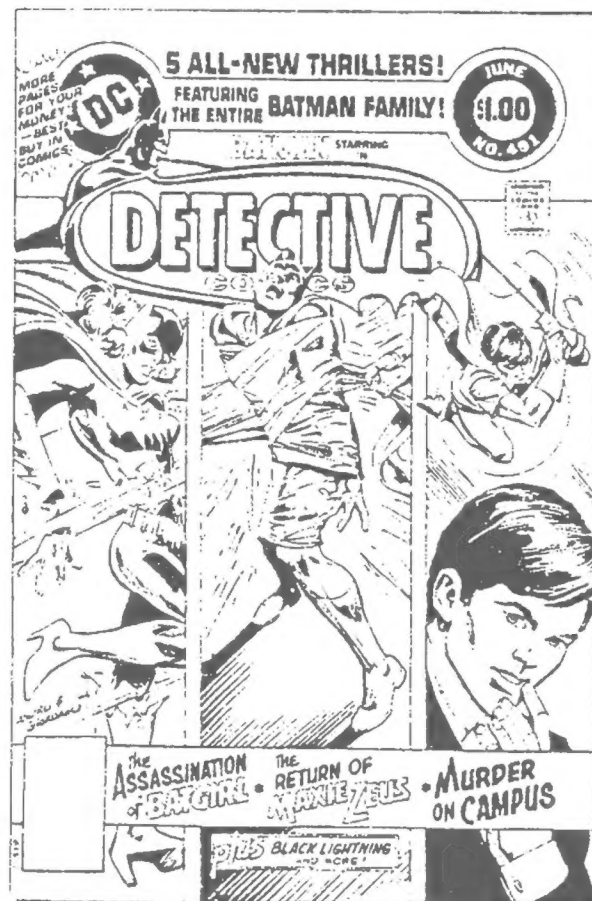
The recent strong sales mean that some new titles are to be rushed onto the schedules, to replace the reprint books that are holding press time for Marvel; MOON KNIGHT moves into his own title after HULK MAGAZINE #20, to be replaced there by DOMINIC FORTUNE, scripted by Denny O'Neil and drawn and coloured by Howard Chaykin. Fortune will also appear in the 40 cent line in a showcase title, with a story plotted and pencilled by Chaykin, and scripted by Michelinie--Terry Austin will ink it as soon as his busy schedule allows.

DR WHO is definitely on, as a monthly comic --I've seen Dave Gibbons' cover roughs for the first two issues, which will of course reprint material from Britain's 12p weekly title, and they're looking good!

SUB-MARINER should soon return, to replace the reprint TALES TO ASTONISH; the western project CALEB HAMMER is also still waiting.

There are even reports that Stan Lee is going around saying that he wants to do THE SILVER SURFER again on a regular basis, but he's looking for the right artist. It's a shame Michelangelo is dead... -TCR

HULK #249 is drawn by Steve Ditko. -TCR



will again become an independent publisher. His immediate plans call for 6 monthly titles, starting in April and including new material, and not only will HOUSE OF HAMMER #24 appear, it is possible the title will continue! Dez is putting his full creative energy behind what he intends to be a whole new range of titles to inspire wholesalers and readers, with film tie-ins and other projects coming up -- 1980 should be an exciting year!

"Good Lord" -- "Oh, My God"...no, these are not reactions to the previous item, but two phrases that had recently been banned by the Comics Code Authority, and now, after Marvel and DC making strenuous representations, are once again allowed.

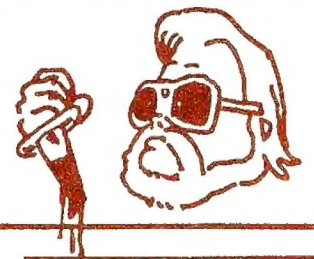
Gold Key comics are no more; the line will now be known as Whitman Comics, with all distribution limited to plastic bags, and not on newsstands. Starting with issues cover-dated "003" (March 1980), in America the line will only be available this way, in supermarkets etc. They will probably be bagged by genre and company. The switchover was made because of the alarming increase in unsold newsstand copies; as the Western Printing empire has far more contacts with variety, department and grocery stores, the decision to concentrate exclusively on this type of distribution was not difficult to make.

With the switchover, production has been decreased by 40%, and the weaker titles have been cancelled--BEAGLE BOYS VS. UNCLE SCROOGE, BORIS KARLOFF TALES OF MYSTERY, BULLWINKLE & ROCKY, GRIMM'S GHOST STORIES, HAPPY DAYS, RIPLEY'S BELIEVE IT OR NOT, and TROK SON OF STONE. Only one title, WALT DISNEY'S COMICS & STORIES, remains monthly; it brings the output down from 270 to 167 issues per year. -TCR

MOONSHINE McJUGS is a new strip by Frank Thorne for PLAYBOY--it will debut in the April issue. Congratulations, Frank! -ML

Stain Lee presents

DEZ the KNIFE



HI THERE. MY NAME'S BEMLOCK AND TODAY I'M GOING TO BE INTERVIEWING DEZ SKINFUL, THE LAD FROM OOP NORTH WHO RECENTLY TOOK OVER BRITISH MARBLE COMICS.

MR. SKINFUL CAN SEE YOU NOW...

C'MIN LAD, I'VE STARTED THE METER, MY SECRETARY SHOULD HAVE TOLD YOU T'GOING RATE. NOW, HOW CAN I HELP? — TAKE AS LONG AS YOU LIKE...

SUTHERLAND

I MUST SAY THIS IS A PLEASURE IT IS FOR ME TOO

THAT'S WHAT I MEANT

CAN YOU EXPLAIN TO THE READERS YOUR PHENOMENAL SUCCESS?

WHEN I CAME HERE THERE WERE A LOAD OF BLOKBS SLAVING AWAY — WOULD YOU BELIEVE THEY WERE DOING IT 'COS THEY LIKED COMICS?

LOOK AT WHAT THEY USED TO PRODUCE. ALL THOSE PAGES FOR JUST 10p — AND REPRINTING STORIES IN FULL — WHO WANTS TO SEE ALL THAT BORING NON-ACTION INBETWEEN?

KIDS DON'T

BUT SURELY IT ISN'T ALL KIDS WHO READ COMICS?

WHAT ABOUT OLDER READERS, ADULTS?

ADULTS READ COMICS!?! THAT'S A GOOD 'UN!

I MEAN WHAT SELF RESPECTING ADULT WOULD PAY 10p FOR ONE OF OUR COMICS. IF YOU LOOK AT A RACK AND CAN'T SEE ANYTHING IT'S ONE OF OUR COMICS STANDING SIDE ON...

COME IN...

HI... BLECHH KNIGHT HERE...

AAAARGH! NO! HE LOOKS TOO SENSIBLE FOR KIDDIE READERS!

QUICK RICH, GET IN HERE...

MAKE HIM LOOK RIDICULOUS! STICK SOME EARS ON HIM OR SOMETHING...

WHO ARE THEY?

THAT'S MY ASSISTANT RICH BURDEN & HIS WIFE LIZ

YOU'VE REVIVED CAPTAIN BITTEN. HE WAS THE BIGGEST FLOP IN THE HISTORY OF MARBLE COMICS. WHAT DOES STAIN LEE THINK OF THIS?

HE WAS?

STAIN WHO?

WHERE DO YOUR BRITISH 'BULK' STORIES FIT INTO THE CONTINIVITY?

AAARGH!

GLASS OF WATER FOR THE AYATOLLAH!

HE SAID THAT WORD — CONTINIVITY!

SEE MY ACT IN HERE YOU PAUL NEARLY AT WORK

CUTTING ROOM

EUROPE

HE MOVED HERE FROM WARRING COMICS 'COS IT'S SO MUCH BETTER PAID HERE. WE ADAPT THE SCRIPTS FROM OLD 'DONALD AND MICKEY'S AND IF PAUL CAN'T BE BOTHERED TO TURN OUT A COVER WE JUST PUTS AN ADVERT ON.

AYE, WHERE THERE'S MUCK THERE'S BRASS

HOW DO YOU SPELL 'POW'?

ONE LAST QUESTION DEZ: WHOSE IDEA WAS IT FOR YOU TO LEAVE 'HALLS OF HOUSE OF HORRID' TO JOIN MARBLE? YOU?

NO KNEEL TENNANT?

NOPE

NICK LUNG?

NIEN

STAIN LEE?

UH-UH

WHO THEN?

BEM

I. P. C.

THE END (WELL & TRULY)

THE BEM INTERVIEW

This should be the first of a series of interviews with people active in British comics, conducted by willing volunteer Adam Pirani--the illustrations, by Kev F. Sutherland, aren't likely to be used in future but, as I'd got them in stock for use in Bem, and they had been seen, and approved, by Dez himself, this seemed too good an opportunity to miss. I rather get the feeling that Kev had some artwork rejected by British Marvel during 1979! Anyway, Adam Pirani ventured off into the wilds of Kentish Town late in November to Jadwin House, the home of Marvel Britain, with cassette recorder in hand and an appointment to interview British Marvel's Editorial Director. The ex-editor of Mad Magazine, Fantasy Advertiser, and House of Hammer, and now the man who leads the Marvel Revolution...the one and only...

DEZ SKINN

AP: How do you come to be here at Marvel?

DS: Via newspapers and enthusiasm. I was offered the job here because Marvel Comics wanted to change the look of their comics after publishing in Britain for about six or seven years. They'd tried all their good ideas, and they didn't really know the British market--so they wanted someone who'd had a lot of experience in it. They knew me, and so they asked me if I'd set the whole thing up.

AP: What work had you been doing in publishing before you came here?

DS: Six years at IPC, working on the boys' comics; before that, newspapers, and after that, I edited Mad Magazine, created and edited House of Hammer, and then edited, published and created Starburst. So, that is about a ten year period.

AP: What do you actually do in this job?

DS: As Editorial Director I'm responsible for the overall direction of the product. Basic ideas for new titles, breathing fresh life into existing titles, trying to make the whole thing run smoothly; my full title is Editorial Director, but I prefer to put Editor, it doesn't sound too grand.

AP: To what extent is this operation tied to Marvel in the U.S., compared to the company run by your predecessor?

DS: It's now totally different. It used to be edited in the Marvel offices on Madison Avenue, with only the advertisements and letter columns added over here. Marvel Britain was a production office, whereas now it originates from here. If I want to reprint a strip, I've got a full-time man in America with a little Union Jack on his desk who acts as the liaison man. He sits beside people working for Marvel in America, and he sends over any material I want to use.

AP: How do you know what material you might want to reprint?

DS: I've been reprinting comics since they came into this country; I bought Fantastic Four #1 when it came out. I'm quite familiar with American comics, and I've worked long enough in the industry to have a few ideas of my own. And of course everybody else here chips in -- it isn't a one-man show. There are about a dozen of us in the office, and another dozen working outside, and I'd like to think that we're all creative.

AP: Did you set any goals for the last year or so you've been here, concepts you wanted created and pushed through, and have you achieved them?

DS: Yes. I wanted to segregate the mar-

ket, I wanted the product to sell, and I wanted it to be more British. We now have adult magazines like Starburst, which will also sell to younger readers; we have middling magazines like Rampage and Marvel Superheroes, which will also sell to the younger audience; and we have younger ones like Spider-Man and Hulk which will also sell to the older audience. But you have to aim at a specific market, you have to have a hard core of readers, a market in view, otherwise it's impossible to put a product together. So I've tried to give Marvel Britain sights, aims, goals.

AP: My main criticism of Marvel in Britain is that 95% of your material is still reprints; there are only about 15 pages of original material per week out of four weeklies and three monthlies. How do you feel about this?

DS: I think that when it comes to doing superheroes, America has been doing them since about 1938; Britain has never really done superheroes, so for British artists to draw superheroes would be stupid, because they are better at drawing other things. But I'm not going to say "We stop doing Spider-Man because it's American", and neither am I going to say "come on, let's draw and write superheroes"...we're better at doing other things. The superhero market is not the biggest in Britain, because our whole lifestyle is different.

AP: The American Dream?

DS: The whole American Dream, right. We don't feel that way; our comics tend to reflect a much more adventure and comedy, slapstick approach. They're much more gentle in their own way--OK so some of the contemporary titles are not what you call "gentle", but they don't have the perfect hero. We have flawed heroes, much more than Spider-Man could ever be; let the Americans do the superheroes, and we'll do everything else.

AP: It is cheaper to reprint than create?

DS: I think that's a pretty safe comment to make. If you reprint it, it doesn't cost anything--but if you create it, it costs script, artwork, lettering. It's much cheaper to reprint.

AP: Isn't that one of the reasons Neal Adams and his friends won't work in comics--foreign reprinting without payment?

DS: No..no..no...the reason they won't work in comics is that Neal Adams and his friends are not comic strip artists. They have to learn how to draw comics, really. If they want to do things which are not comics, which are much finer pieces of work, then they should find a medium which is prepared to pay for the amount of time they need to do it. Comic books can't afford such fine pieces of work, they're at a commercial standard that you have to reach. Anything beyond that standard is totally self-indulgent.

AP: You're expanding through things like Dr Who; how do you see things eventually?

DS: Marvel's future in this country is to capitalise on its success, and extend the boundaries, rather than limiting itself to the four-colour superhero concept; to go further and further afield, not just in comics either. Dr Who isn't just a comic, it's got feature material in. That isn't padding, any more than Starburst as a feature magazine is padding--it's because I think there's a market, and that there is life beyond comics, and Marvel has to move into that area, and become a bigger all-round publisher rather than being just a comics publisher.

AP: Is House of Hammer going to return?

WE'RE PROUD OF OUR ACHIEVEMENTS HERE AT MARBLE COMICS. FOR EXAMPLE THE FIRST ISSUE OF 'BULK COMIC' HAS SOLD A MILLION COPIES!



DS: There will definitely be a number 24, I've got most of the material in the next office, but with all the new projects we have been working on, some of which you've seen, time is the biggest factor. I've no desire to continue as an independent publisher. The only reason I became independent was for the creative freedom. I was willing to take the risk, and it's a very big risk. I printed about a quarter of a million copies of Starburst before Marvel Comics took the enterprise over. That was a very big risk, but I did it because I wanted to, there's no attempt here to become a great financial controller of comics. With Marvel we get that creative outlet, so there's no reason for me to go back to publishing independently. We do what we believe will sell, and so long as our track record's clean, America is only too happy to leave us to it.

AP: Is it fair to compare English and American comics, say in circulations and--

DS: Oh yes, very fair, because we come out on top. In America, you sell something like 35% of your print run, 40% on a good day, as the comics are sent out on "sale or return". In Britain you sell 98% of your print run. It's a much safer business, let me tell you. So it comes out very favourably for us.

AP: Can you give me some idea of the circulation of your magazines?

DS: We have a total of about eight million readers a month; that's worked out from about 3.5 readers per copy, which is one of those wonderful old statistics... I always wondered who the point five was. We're doing about 2½ million copies per month, which compares quite favourably with America because we're weekly. Take Star Wars for instance; we sell about as many copies a week as they do a month. Right? So we're selling four times as many copies a year as they are. And we get weekly advertising revenue, while they get monthly advertising revenue.

AP: Can you go through the history of the production of a new comic?

DS: Basically there's a system; we launch a weekly in spring and a weekly in autumn. The monthlies we launch with not quite the same regularity. You might find a couple of new monthlies suddenly come out at an odd time of the year, but we find the best time for launching weeklies is the spring and the autumn. So every year we will increase by two new titles, though

some of our existing titles may fall by the wayside. This is a practise in juvenile publishing that is accepted, it's a necessity in fact, because when you merge two comics together they get the joint circulation, thus the joint sales, for a period of time, which is why you have so many mergers in British comics. It's not unique to Marvel--it happens with all the British comics. So, first comes the idea. I know right now that we're going to be launching new weeklies in spring and in autumn 1980, so already the ideas have been thought out. I know exactly what they will be, unless something big happens, another Star Wars suddenly breaks.

AP: Do the ideas come from you?

DS: It would be terribly vain to say they all come from me, but I think the majority of them do, albeit sometimes influenced by what other people have said. You absorb things around you, and you put them together and you suddenly think "Well, this one would work", and so you change it round a lot, there's an awful lot of change that takes place before something starts. Doctor Who for instance; I was going to produce Doctor Who while I was doing House of Hammer, it got as far as getting in touch with the BBC. Things were going fine until the publisher suddenly found that they weren't producing enough magazines. My area was doing ok, I was then managing editor of the general magazines; they also produced s-e-x magazines which were not selling too good, they'd gone from about thirty titles a month to three, and it wasn't worth their huge overheads to produce their three magazines and my Mad and House of Hammer. The Doctor Who idea had been smouldering for a long time, it was then going to be a monthly but we decided to do it as a weekly.

AP: How far ahead of publication do you have to work on the weekly comics?

DS: There's a lead time of about 7 weeks, that is it leaves us for the printer 7 weeks before it appears in the shops; you have got another week before that for all the finishing off to be done, films to be made, typesetting, and all that. An artist works at the rate of between 3 and 5 pages a week, depending on the quality and the speed.

AP: That's pencils and inks?

DS: That would be the whole job, yes. Although Paul Neary, for instance, spends the majority of his time laying things out, to try and get a more dynamic look to the page, because British artists do have talent but they don't approach things in the same way Americans do. We've tried to get the best of both worlds, the dynamism of America combined with the slightly more subtle approach of Britain, which hopefully does come across in Doctor Who, Night Raven, Black Knight etc. The writer takes about another week before that, so really you're talking about something like a 12-week lead time that we're working on, 52 weeks a year. You can take holidays in some jobs, but we can hardly not put an issue out because everybody's gone on holiday that week. It's much more difficult than a monthly market. With one weekly publication you don't just have a writer, a penciller, an inker, a letterer and a colourist -- you have countless writers, letterers and artists.

AP: One of the things I prefer about British comics is that there's a greater range of styles.

DS: Yes, we're not part of this superhero craze.

AP: You've got the simplicity of Mike McMahon, to the intricacy of Brian Bolland.

DS: I find Brian's art more simple than Mike's to read. I think that American Marvel has very much at different times had different artists' house styles. You

had the Jack Kirby house style, and now the John Buscema house style, but that's only because they were and are very commercial people. Then you have the Neal Adams house style, which is the self-indulgent house style, the one of "I want my artwork to look good and I want to be a celebrity at conventions". That's not a commercial style that will remain for years and years to come. In Britain, you don't have that. You used to; when I was at IPC all the humour artists had to draw like either Leo Baxendale or a guy called Reg Parrott, and the adventure artists were all in the Joe Colquhoun or the Eric Bradbury style, he used to draw Maxwell Hawke. It's changed now, it's opened up. Nobody knows where they're going. It's getting terribly directionless. Publishers are getting frightened.

AP: What do you enjoy most about your job?

DS: The creativity. What more could you want, it's very creative.

AP: What do you hope to accomplish within the scope of your work here--do you just want Marvel to get bigger and bigger, and fatter and fatter?

DS: I suppose so. I wouldn't be a very faithful employee if I didn't.

AP: How does the industry get by in Britain, is it the merchandising or the comics themselves?

DS: We've got about 150 licensed products in Britain alone on Hulk and Spider-Man and everybody else, but we don't rely on them. It's not like America.

AP: The comics would stand up on their own?

DS: Yes, easily. The comics would stand up without that. It's a much healthier environment than America, simply because of distribution. It's got nothing to do with the product, it's what happens to the product once it's printed.

AP: Do you feel fandom in Britain directs its attention unfairly towards American comics?

DS: I think American comics do tend to appeal to a wider age group, so as fandom is comprised primarily of teenagers they are going to look at the American product much more than at the British, because there tends to be an age ceiling for the British comics. As long as they're printed so badly, nobody over the age of thirteen would be seen dead with a comic. At least the American comics are more acceptable from the outside, and more presentable.

AP: The quality of the British Star Wars is much higher than of the American one.

DS: Everyone knew Marvel as an American company first. You talk about fandom. What is fandom? How do you define...what's a fan? I'll do an interview with you, and we'll feature it in Marvel Superheroes!

AP: Somebody who buys a comic and doesn't throw it away afterwards.

DS: So what is fandom?

AP: A collection of such people...

DS: Who know about the existence of each other. I think that's the big difference. Comics fandom is vast in Britain. I imagine we have thirty or forty thousand fans who regularly buy all the British Marvel comics, and they are fans, they collect them, we get countless letters, "missed issue such-and-such of so-and-so. Can you provide it? When the hauliers strike hit us in January 1979, everyone went into a panic. We were heralding Star Wars £50 as having a big feature in it and a photo cover, and it came out a month late because it was held up in the strike -- and we were inundated with letters. I found with Starburst and with House of Hammer that we've had a fan following of countless thousand, but, none of these people have sat down and produced magazines about us, so they're not considered fans. You've got maybe 2000 fans of American comics. American comics aren't that big over here,

you get something like 19,000 of each title a month, as opposed to over 100,000 of each title a week of British comics.

AP: But isn't there contact between fans of American comics, whereas the Star Wars £50 fans are all separate.

DS: Yes, but they're still fans. What I'm trying to say is that fandom can't be a driving force when it's so small. There are more magazines produced because they are older people who have the money, or the ability to produce fan magazines. As far as the fan element goes, there is a large quantity of fans of the British product, who could swamp the fans of the American product.

AP: Can the individual fan ever influence the fandom as a whole?

DS: I think so. If we wanted, we could blitzkrieg fandom. If we did a really big push on a convention and suddenly got 10,000 of our fans going along... How many fans go to the conventions? 750? 1000? And suddenly you get 10,000 of our fans there. There's no reason for doing so, although we've got something coming up in 1980; we have got a few things up our sleeve.

AP: Don't you think people should be more aware of British comics?

DS: They are aware, that's what I'm trying to say. They are fans of the medium, they buy it, they appreciate it. They don't write to each other about it, they don't hype the back issues and say "Oh number one is worth a fortune because I've got a price guide (that another fan put out) that says it's worth that much money" so you don't get this inflation. Now fandom I used to think was very nice; I was a very active fan in the sixties, and in fact into the seventies when I didn't have a creative outlet at IPC so I still did fan magazines and conventions and such, but the fan element now I'm afraid I find terribly disappointing, because instead of being involved with the product, they are too involved with how to make money out of the product, it's become too much of a business. I think it's very sad. So maybe it's better in a way that the fan's communication is directly with the product rather than creating this élite, this snobbism, and this terribly capitalistic approach.

AP: Don't you think you perpetuate this by employing fans?

DS: I don't really employ fans...

AP: Steve Dillon and Richard Burton?

DS: Steve Dillon I employ because he can draw. What he does in his spare time is up to him. He learnt how to draw by reading comics, he approached me through Richard in fact, so there is a fan link. But Steve Dillon can't change the shape of British Marvel by being a fan. He can change its shape by being able to draw, because he can thus be one better artist than we would have had if he wasn't there, maybe. But really I think fans can be destructive, which has happened in America --and that's a situation I wouldn't want to get into. I think it's happened in this country as well, actually.

AP: In what way?

DS: Fans do tend to be self-indulgent. Fans like to write about what they like to read, or they like to draw what they like to look at, and you have to first get that knocked out of you and realise that you're drawing for the main audience, or you're writing for the main audience, who are not 'fandom' fans. Doctor Who, for instance. The reaction we've had to that, it's been absolutely fantastic, but they don't go into great details about the quality--"and the pencils are let down by the inks", and all that -- they just like it as a total, and they buy every issue, and they write in and say "I missed issue #2, please send me a copy". They like it

as a total though, they don't tear it to pieces for the sake of it; it's first commercial, and second creative, because if it isn't commercial, forget it.

AP: What sort of feedback do you get?

DS: Oh it's absurd. With Doctor Who we got over a thousand letters in the first ten days; well, I insist on reading every single letter--that sounds like a cliché but it's true--I don't care whether it's from a four-year-old whose writing is unreadable, because at the end of it, and it's really a lot to get through, when I've read all those thousand letters that came in during those first ten days, I have a pretty good idea of what the audience wants.

AP: Are you going to be reprinting anything other than US Marvel superheroes, colour to black and white?

DS: Mmmmmh...

AP: What ideas do you have in that direction? Don't you get bored with--

DS: Basically you've got a situation wherein I've done as much to the American material as I can, to make it look acceptable for our market; I've changed it all around.

AP: More panels, etc?



DS: To make busier pages, yes. At IPC, we used to be in situations where there was a staff of four or five to each comic, budgets of something like £2000 to £2500 per week for each title, and countless artists we had to control, or chase, or worry about. Here, we don't have a staff to a comic, we have the dozen of us who do the lot, and we jump around. One day it's Doctor Who, the next day it's Marvel Superheroes, the next day it's helping out on Starburst--this prevents the boredom. Paul Neary jumps around so much it most likely drives him spare; one minute he'll be doing a Hulk cover, then a Spider-Man cover, the next something for Marvel Superheroes, then he'll be doing the layouts on the Black Knight, and then he'll do finished artwork on a strip for Doctor Who Weekly. So we get enough variety out of our 300 pages or so. By the way, I don't know how you got that figure of 95%?

AP: It was just a guess.

DS: Well, when you consider that Starburst is all new...

AP: I wasn't counting Starburst.

DS: You weren't counting Starburst? I don't discriminate, it's all publishing, it's all interesting publishing with a view to the fantastic, whether it's words and pictures or...

AP: But isn't Starburst a separate unit because it's not comics?

DS: But it's the same audience, isn't it? If a 14-year-old buys Doctor Who and Starburst, he doesn't think of them as being separate. Is Doctor Who a comic?

AP: Yes, because it has strips in.

DS: But it has features in, doesn't that make it a magazine?

AP: I think more people would buy it for the comics than for the features.

DS: You say that because you're a comics

fan; what if you were a Doctor Who fan? AP: Then I'd buy it anyway.

DS: It's the same as House of Hammer; I got two markets that way. I got people who liked horror films and who were members of the Christopher Lee Fan Club, who couldn't stand comics, and I got the comic fans who couldn't stand Hammer, simply by trying to get the best of both, to get the best possible artwork, so that the comic strips were not Beano and Dandy comic strips, they were really red-hot adaptations of the movies, and it really did look like Christopher Lee. And by trying to make the features sometimes witty, but invariably informative, we could get the fans to read them; I'd like to think it was instrumental in this move whereby comics fans now are willing to look at things beyond comics. A lot of comic fans read Starlog and Starburst, I'm sure.

AP: That's presumably very successful, mixing two markets?

DS: It can be. It can be disastrous, you can lose both, that's the risk of it; it's not necessarily a success by combining both, you might find the horror fans say "I can't stand comics" and the comics fans "I can't stand Hammer", so it's a risk, but it worked.

AP: Marvel are the only superhero comics producers in Britain, aren't you. You've captured the market!

DS: We've got a copyright on it, it's as simple as that. IPC could not put out a comic with superheroes in it, and call them superheroes, because the term is copyrighted by Marvel and DC. It's an interesting little fact.

AP: There's a British-created superhero strip in Graphic Sense that I think just falls over.

DS: Superheroes are an American phenomenon.

AP: So why are you so successful with them?

DS: Because there is a market for them. It's not as big as the market for the Beano or the Dandy, which are creative in their own way, but there is a market for them. We can't push them any further though; we've taken them as far as they'll go, which is why now we're doing other things, and why I attempted to make an adventure comic out of Marvel, by putting in non-superhero strips, with Conan, and Dracula, and Skull, and Godzilla, and all the others.

AP: So why did that stop--was it selling badly?

DS: We got off to a bit of a bad start really, because when we were off the stands for a month, just before we launched the 'new look', it rather killed a lot of the power of the change. Really it's unfortunately not down to the readers--you are as good as your distribution, you really are.

AP: Yes?

DS: The way it works on a comic book is what's called "firm sale", which means if they take it from you they have to sell it. When we all came in and changed Marvel so drastically, I went round and did lots of talks to the wholesalers and the trade about how different it would be, and in fact our wholesale orders for the weeklies went up by 33%. Now this was a very big commitment on the part of the wholesalers.

If they couldn't sell them, they were stuck with them. Great! Unfortunately, they didn't get the product until a month late, and so by the time that month of nothing had gone by, they started getting a little worried; that's one of the boring production sides of it, but it did get us off to a rather slow start. It got all of us off to a bad start, because by then the trade had almost forgotten about us. Once they get them the market's there; it isn't purely a matter of dead copies, it's a



matter of actually getting the wholesalers to take the goods, and supply them to the retailers. The number of people we get saying "we can't find Starburst", and they can't find this that and the other, is quite fantastic. Retailers come out with great stories, they say "it's packed in", "doesn't exist any more", whatever, they just don't make the effort. Why should they? How many magazines do you imagine there are in this country, all genres--men's magazines, women's magazines, sex magazines, everything? In total hundreds, maybe even thousands. We're producing eight or nine; it's a bit of a drop in the ocean. So you go into a shop and say "have you got Starburst?" He doesn't know what Starburst is, why should he, and for him to make the effort to get a copy is asking a lot of him; if he had it already you'd buy it, and somebody else would see it and they'd buy it maybe. The stumbling block is on the distribution side, but we're still better off than America.

AP: How does the "boom issue" system work, the issues which up the circulation?

DS: It's a trade bribe. We give away free gifts and the fans say "We don't want plastic aeroplanes and toffee." Sure you don't, they're not for you, they're not even for the kids, they're for the trade. Here's an example. We send this form out to the trade and say we're spending a hundred thousand pounds to launch this comic, nationwide TV advertising, free gifts in issues one and two; we say all these wonderful things about our product and the trade say "if they're putting that much money into it, it has to be good, so we want to get in on the profit", so they take it. If we don't offer free gifts, if we don't take big advertising promoting the launch, the trade say "Well, why should we". We have to somehow get them to be enthusiastic. Our readers know about it anyway, because if we've got 8,000,000 readers a month, and we launch a new title, we've already got a captive audience for it, but if the trade won't get it in the first place it doesn't matter how many times you go into the newsagent and ask for it.

But we've talked a lot about the commercial side, as opposed to the creative side, which Bem's readers would be more interested in.

AP: Isn't the creative side only 5%?

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etc;etc...



DS: No -- what difference does it make, whether I get the finished artwork from America or from St Albans?

AP: Bem's readers will probably have read the material from America.

DS: How many copies of Bem do they sell?

AP: Oh, not many, but--

DS: Nonetheless, wouldn't Bem's readers be interested in Black Knight, and Doctor Who, and now I got Mills and Wagner from IPC, and Dave Gibbons, and all these more interesting sorts of creative questions, rather than the boring business side?

AP: One of the things I noticed in House of Hammer was that you had a Dave Gibbons strip signed Dave G. Chester...

DS: Dave G. Chester; that's his middle name. Dave Gibbons Chester... Dave Chester Gibbons.

AP: I thought he might be under contract or something.

DS: No, no, no, there are no such things as contracts. But if you're in a situation that your publisher says "you're running late, you're running late, can't you pick up time", and they find out you've drawn a strip for another publisher, they are gonna be annoyed, so he changes his name.

AP: Is Doctor Who going to be reprinted in America?

DS: I don't know when, so I can't give you a definite answer on that; it won't be as good as this one though. ((Laughs))

AP: Is that being negotiated?

DS: Well it's not under negotiation you see, we're still the same company; in America there is an equivalent of me, who has his ideas and approaches things his way, and we're obviously very different people so we're not necessarily going to agree on everything; for instance some of what he's producing we don't use because I don't like it, so we're obviously going to get this creative clash, but Doctor Who will be popping up somewhere, you can be sure of it. There are reasons other than creativity; the aim of the game as far as I'm concerned is not only to make Britons proud of their own industry...

AP: Is that one of the reasons you took this job?

DS: Yes, I saw a vast potential for Marvel; Marvel have proven in America that you can change things, that you can make some things work. In Britain, since the fifties, nobody's ever done that. I said before about it being directionless, I see it as being that; when companies get

too large they're controlled totally by the business side, and the creativity is a very very small part of it. With Marvel we have here now the world's biggest comic book publisher, who have yet to make any real headway into Britain, a publisher who doesn't really know anything about Britain; so the appeal to me is obvious. If I'm offered a chance to try and prove something, to say 'look, British artists, British writers, British ideas', and the British audience responds to it... Which I think as far as the fans go they have. Look at my wall.

AP: FIVE Eagle Awards!!!! ((amazed...))

DS: House of Hammer has won awards, Starburst has won awards--I think this great move towards 2000 A.D. and Starburst and so on is because at long last the fans have been able to say "Hey, there is something presentable in Britain", which has been down to the fan magazines to report, they won't know it's there unless they do. Look-In's always missed out, I don't know why; obviously there's something socially unacceptable to fans about a well printed, beautifully coloured...

AP: It's probably--

DS: They're not superheroes?

AP: No, I mean I have bought Look-In; it is probably the pop star image.

DS: But isn't it worth 11p for two pages of John Burns full-colour art, and Martin Asbury and John Bolton?

AP: Maybe they feel it's a kiddies comic.

DS: But it's so beautifully produced.

AP: I agree, I agree.

DS: I'm not attacking you, I'm attacking fandom; and I'd be very interested, in the next issue of Bem, to hear why nobody ever talks about Look-In, when that's got some of the top British talent in it; if the readers of Bem are interested in comic strips, the scripts and the artwork, why does nobody ever mention Look-In? ((To Paul Neary)) What do you think of that then, Paul?

Paul Neary: Terrific, Dez.

DS: Be proud of being British, and, eventually anyway, go beyond--trying to get some pride back into what we can produce.

Now this is self-indulgent; this is me doing my Neal Adams bit. I'd like to show America that there's a world outside the USA; they were very shocked when they discovered Jean-Pierre Dionnet's METAL HURLANT because it was done differently, and they said "Oh this is rather different", and all the major publishers turned it down you know. Marvel and DC wouldn't touch it with a barge-pole. That's what became HEAVY METAL; now everybody wants to do the same.

AP: EPIC? Will you be reprinting it, and Weirdworld?

DS: Oh, I wouldn't touch Weirdworld. It was a bit of a disaster. We'll be doing something with EPIC--but SAVAGE SHE-HULK might make more profit, though.

AP: In America? More profit than EPIC?!

DS: It could well do, simply because the Hulk is the biggest thing there is for Marvel; nothing else makes them more money. Spider-Man maybe equals it, but there's no guarantee that EPIC will make any money at all.

AP: Can't they put the price up a bit?

DS: And have less readers? HEAVY METAL didn't work in this country y'know; they imported it, it didn't sell. They ended up job-lotting their copies off to one of the 'major specialist outlets' in London. We're a very fickle market.

AP: Is 2000 A.D. a competitor to you; do people think "shall I buy 2000 A.D. or Star Wars Weekly?"

DS: It depends how much money they've got. I think we're all competitors; Doctor Who is a competitor to Star Wars Weekly. You can't buy everything; we get letters from

readers saying "please don't come out with any more comics, I can't afford any more!" So we're all competitors--but at the same time they're all complementary, because the day there are less comics on the newsstand is a sad day, because space begins to shrink and shrink, and then the retailer puts other product in the space he used to use for comics. And then later when there's a boom, and more comics appear, he prefers to give the space to the Economist, or Playboy. So I think we all work together in many ways. If extra artists and writers appear, it doesn't matter who trains them; it gives the artists more opportunities to get in, and more freedom once he's in there, so I do not think we really compete that strongly. We keep each other on our toes.

AP: We were talking about professionalism and creativity. I think that the British artists seem to be far more refined, even though they're professionals.

DS: We're a jolly refined lot, we Brits. It's tradition. Comics started in this country before they did in America--you ask Denis Gifford, he'll tell you! And we just have different traditional approaches. The American comic is born out of its violent heritage, and ours is born out of our much quieter heritage; we're much slower, I think we demand more variety. Different worlds, they really are--which is why we drastically changed the American product for this market.

AP: What do you think of the future of comics, in both countries?

DS: I think they have to find direction. If you look at the biggest British comics publisher, IPC, they're very segregated now. You've got a sports comic, Tiger; a football comic, Roy of the Rovers; a war comic, Battle-Action; a science fiction comic, 2000 A.D. When I was a kid, you didn't have any of those--well, you had Tiger, but it was a different kind of Tiger. I used to read things like Hotspur, and in that you had western, detective, sport, science fiction, they were all in there together. I wasn't really interested in sport, but I'd read it because it wouldn't all be happening on the playing fields or wherever. They were a nice varied assortment, but now it's all segregated. Thus, to reach the same audience you have to put out that many more titles. You don't have one comic that will appeal to everybody, which is sad, but obviously it's the way the market's going. I tried to make a comic that would appeal to everyone, Marvel Comic, by putting a variety of comic strips in there, everything except football. Maybe it's just that Marvel's image is that of a superhero company--which is one of the big things we really have to change, and we have changed, by producing Doctor Who which I think came as a great surprise to everyone, all our fans. All the British Marvel fans must have groaned at the thought of us producing Doctor Who. When I started putting teasers in about our new comic, we were getting people writing in saying "Hope it's Captain Britain" and things like that. Captain Britain has a very big following. But it wouldn't be Captain Britain; we wanted to do something different, and we are doing. We're getting a lot of publicity, and a much larger audience, and we're starting to encroach on other people's territory.

AP: How about America? Do you see anything dynamic happening?

DS: Something dynamic has to happen. DC are trying their digest comics, Marvel are trying their super specials, because as I've said a few times, it's much worse in America than in Britain. They're at the mercy of the only printing house in America, and once a year the printer will

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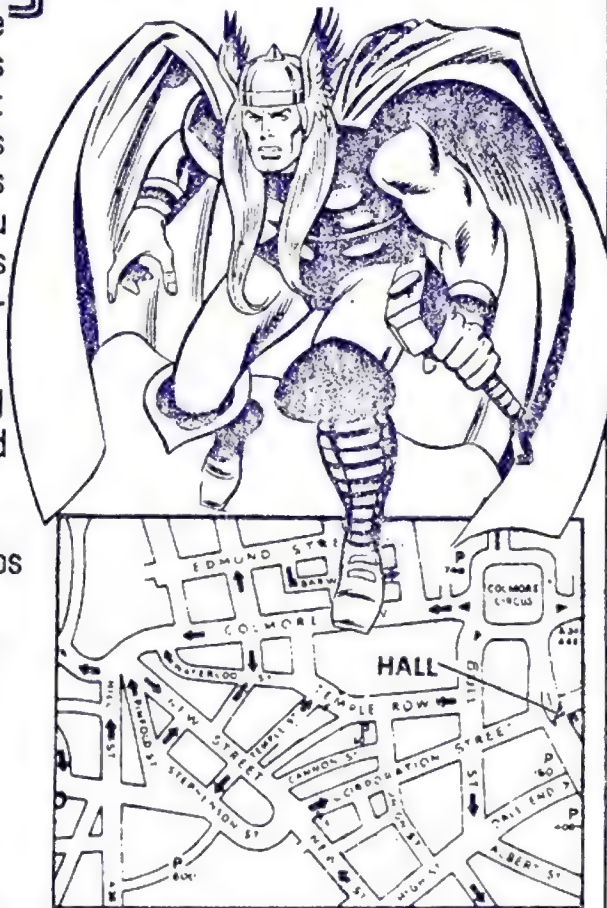
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say, "Hey we've got to put the prices up or we've got to cut the quality, what do you want?" And they say "Cut the quality" every time, so they're having to experiment, it's dire necessity, and it's had its failures. I was disappointed to find out from DC that Jonah Hex failed as a digest comic. Superman and Batman worked, but Jonah Hex failed -- which must say something about the audience. The Super Specials that Marvel are doing, some hit and some miss. Kiss 'hit', and the Beatles 'missed'. Star Wars, a fantastic success -- Meteor bombed out. It's very difficult when you have to experiment, because you tend to rush into things. We don't have to experiment, we choose to experiment -- like the monthlies that we're producing. People have said to me "I hear that the weeklies are dying out, and that's why you're producing the monthlies" -- no way. It's just a way to expand. You see, the theory is, when you start reading comics; British comics, when you've got past the Beano and Dandy, Spider-Man will appeal to you because you've heard of the character and you've got countless Spider-Man toys. When you're a bit older, beyond Spider-Man and the Hulk, you'll go onto things like Rampage and Marvel Super-heroes; which look a little more respectable -- and then when you get a little older still, and you're getting a little bit tired of comics, but you still like the whole idea of fantasy, you'll move on to Starburst. It keeps you with the publisher from the age of five or six right up into your twenties, instead of dropping out at the age of twelve.

AP: What effect do you think your "Marvel Revolution" has had on the comic market in Britain? I mean the fans, and the ordinary people, and the publishers.

DS: I think the fans notice us because we are just doing something. The other publishers are noting us more because we are starting to take name titles; "Hulk" is a name, "Doctor Who" is a name, and "Star Wars" is a name. I think we're making our presence felt because we've got direction now, and that direction is the media. Why try to launch something that nobody's ever heard of, when you can launch a pre-sold commodity, done in "Marvel Style". So I think we're being noticed; I know a few people in editing and publishing who are jealous of us, and some of the things that we can do. Like our glossy covers for 12p -- that's something I know a few people at IPC would dearly love to be able to do, but they can't afford it, and they'd love to know how come we can.

AP: You seem to have a much higher quality of printing; is that just because you're featuring less original material?

DS: No, the printing cost's got nothing to do with the artwork costs; the print costs rule. We're litho, we're offset instead of being letterpress, our paper is smoother, so we can print half-tone instead of just line, and I really mean line. Even solid blacks break up in some of the comics I look at. So yes, I think we're having an effect. I hope we are!

AP: Are you at all involved in fandom, do you read magazines...?

DS: Oh, I read all the fanzines I'm sent; I haven't got any subscriptions to any of them. I read everything I'm sent though; I agree with some of it and disagree with other bits of it. I don't think I'll ever detach myself from it, because I was far too involved in its early days.

AP: Do you read fanzines just to find the bits about your comics?

DS: ((Laughs)) No! No of course not. I read them partially to see if there's any good talent coming up, because it's the only way I'd find out. Sure we get lots of people sending in drawings, from ten-

year-olds to twenty-five-year-olds, but it's one thing having a drawing sent in by somebody -- to follow someone's progress in a fanzine means a lot more.

AP: What writers and artists will you be having; will you be introducing ones who haven't worked for Marvel before?

DS: There are a few "name artists" who've approached us, guys who've been around for quite a while, who have reputations, who will be working for us over the next few months. It's expanding, that's the key to it all, and as it expands we need more, and so more people come in.

AP: What things are there at the moment, is it just Doctor Who...?

DS: Including our winter specials, we've got twelve products on the newsstand now.

AP: One thing about the winter specials; how come you're doing Battlestar Galactica when Look-In is doing it as well?

DS: I've been meaning to ask Colin Shelborne the same question actually, he edits Look-In. We obviously each think we've got the right, but I don't think this is a subject one goes into for a fanzine.

AP: ((Laughs)) So you've got Star Wars...

DS: Which we're changing drastically with issue 100; that's going to have a total new look, it's the only one that hadn't been changed much since the start of the Marvel Revolution.

AP: Are you still getting material far ahead of the American schedule?

DS: Yeah, they're writing and drawing for the British market and being reprinted in America -- they're working to our schedules.

AP: So what strips do you have in Doctor Who Weekly; you have Doctor Who, that's Dave Gibbons always?

DS: That's Dave Gibbons and Pat Mills & John Wagner (or T.B. Grover, or John Howard, or whatever pseudonym...).

AP: And the backup strip?

DS: At the moment that's the Cybermen, which Paul Neary drew the first one of, and Steve Dillon did the second, third and fourth; that's followed by a Sontaran story, a one-off 4-pager that Paul drew, that's followed by "The Stolen Tardis", a tale of the Time Lords, which is a three-parter that Steve Dillon drew, and that's followed by, oh I don't know, the Ice Warriors versus the Cybermen I think, and then there's "Beware of the Dog", which is about K-9, and lots of other things. That's the equivalent of "Van Helsing's Terror Tales", where different artists are doing it.

AP: There's nothing original in Spider-Man, yeah?

DS: Well, there's the cover -- a minor detail, the bit that sells it, you know. ((Laughs)) We often reject the American covers and do our own.

AP: And The Hulk...

DS: We've got Black Knight in it, which is new stuff, and we've still got those Ant-Man stories which we haven't used yet.

AP: British ones?

DS: Yeah, by Steve Dillon, who sounds terribly prolific in all of this, doesn't he? And we've got the ongoing saga of the Night-Raven, with some John Bolton artwork, which has a few interesting twists to come up -- but unfortunately, what with Doctor Who, we haven't got round to the restarting of Night-Raven yet, although we've had a huge demand for it.

AP: Do all the artists work here in the office?

DS: Oh no, the reason Paul's here is that he spends about half his time really as a sort of art editor/art director -- you don't mind me talking about you, do you Paul? Paul Neary: No, carry on.

DS: Feel free to disagree if I say anything you think is at all wrong. Paul spends about half his time drinking cups of -- no, uh, guiding. Artists come in...

You'll notice that Steve Dillon's style has changed an awful lot, and that's because Paul's spent a lot of time with him. AP: Is that something we've yet to see? DS: I'd hoped it was already apparent -- from the Nick Fury through to the material he's doing for Doctor Who. I'd hoped it's progressed, I really would; and it's the same with the other artists, John Stokes, David Lloyd...

AP: Are they, uh... Part time?

DS: I think freelance is the word you're looking for. But it can be full time, being freelance, it's not a quick and easy job. Dave Gibbons is freelance, he has no obligation to us -- you were touching on this before. He could say tomorrow "I'm not going to draw for you any more", but we prefer to have gentlemen's agreements in this country, as opposed to the contracts they have in America. The industry isn't big enough to break your word that often, so you don't need these contracts.

AP: What sort of contact do you have with America, do you just have that little man with the Union Jack, or do you talk to Stan Lee and people like that?

DS: Oh I talk to Stan a lot, I get a lot of letters from him; I go over, I was over there the week before last, tying up deals, talking out new ideas, communicating generally with everybody. I bumped into Chris Claremont at DC, and each of us was shocked to see the other there. It's crazy actually.

AP: Do you still get Marvel comics, and read them? DC comics as well, and the other companies?

DS: Oh yes, we all do. But there is a great link; people, whenever they're over they come up to the office, and there isn't any sort of Marvel-DC or Marvel-IPC hatred, I hope. I mean Levitz and Staton were up here a couple of weeks ago, we don't lock our doors to the competition or anything. We're all working in the same industry and people do chop over a lot, so you can hardly cut yourself off because who's to say what DC is and what Marvel is? They're so integrated in their personnel, while in their policies they tend to be different.

AP: What happened to your funny computer thing that answered questions in Star Wars Weekly?

DS: ((Laughs)) He went to work for IPC!

AP: I think we've pretty well covered everything.

DS: Don't forget, the more you ask, the more you have to transcribe.

AP: That's awfully true. I can't think of a good question to finish with -- but can you give us a good answer anyway?

DS: To finish on a high note, I think that fandom is important, if only as a springboard for anyone who wants to get into this as a career. But anyone who wants to has to realise that their first job has to be as good as the sort of work that's already being accepted -- because, unfortunately, comics is an industry, and not a training school. There are exceptions, like Steve Dillon, but we can't afford the time to train because we've no way of knowing if someone would make it. Fandom nonetheless is, I think, a great thing, because we did all spring out of it; Paul here, myself, Dave Gibbons, Steve Moore, Brian Bolland, and so on... It was our first outlet, and as an outlet for creativity I really hope it does continue.

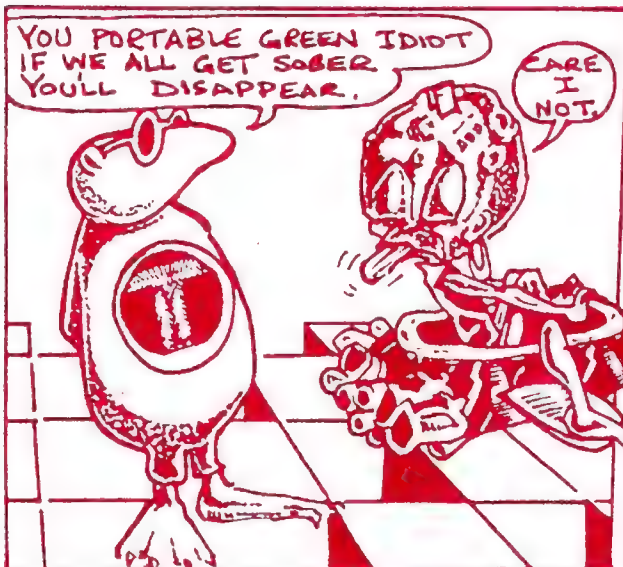
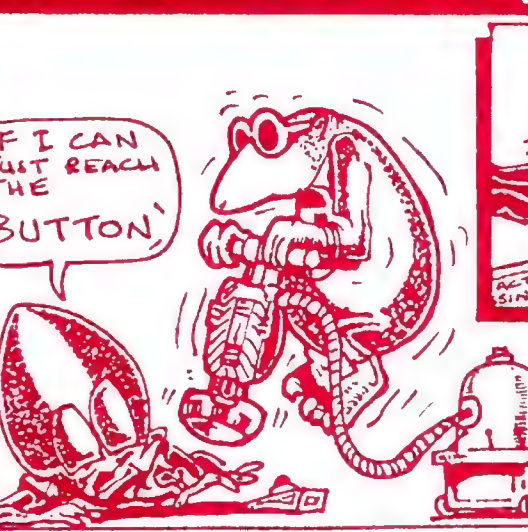
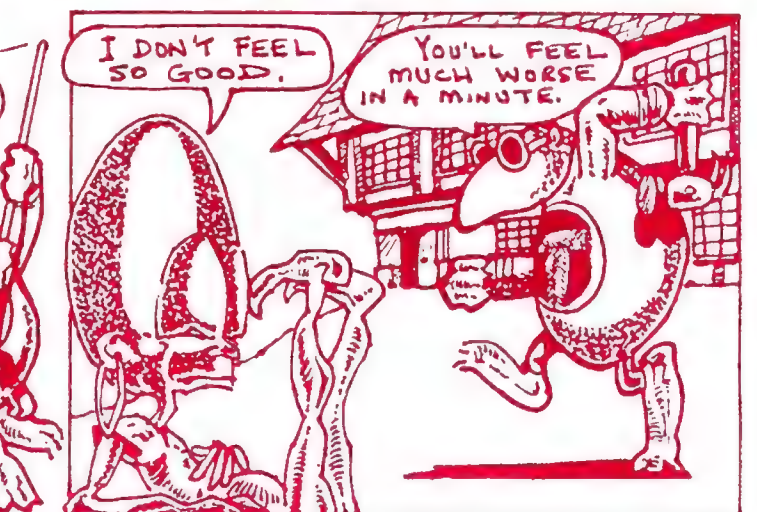
AP: Dez Skinn, thank you.

A final note: I must apologise to Dez for not giving him enough time to go through the interview's text properly, and correct any errors that sneaked in. To get Bem out on time, we could only discuss the text on the phone, and make a few corrections from that. --ML

Thunder Mole



TERRY MOORE.....



Reaction

Steve Grimshaw

There appear to be two debates going on in Reaction at the moment -- one about a certain Neal Adams, and the other about the pence/cents split. Concerning Adams, I consider him to be the most heavily hyped artist of all time. Don't get me wrong, he is good ... but not that good. He draws well, and is along with Byrne and Perez one of the good comic artists, but he is nowhere near the standard of Starlin, Sutton and a few others. He constantly cocks up his deadlines, and is carried by his inkers. Don't believe me? Well, compare X-MEN 62, which he inked himself, with the rest, inked by Tom Palmer. Some difference eh? It seems to me that the Adams fans are behaving like the Rainbow fans who say "Down to Earth" is fantastic, when in reality it's not a patch on "Rising" or "Long Live Rock 'n' Roll". One last point on this is, I was told the Superman versus Muhammad Ali special would change my mind, as it was so wonderful. Well in London recently I looked at one -- now will someone please tell me why in hell is that so good?

Now on to more important matters (?). I have now ordered all my comics as cent versions, for no reason other than at least that way I'm going to get every issue of the comics I collect, I get fed up with being buggered about because after dealers have ordered their stock, some ignorant sod decides that such and such a title isn't going to be imported at 12p. I consider this a valid reason; I do not, however, see a valid reason for charging more for cent back issues than pence copies. I haven't seen Colin Campbell's sales lists, but am I correct in assuming that because I have a cents copy and a pence copy of AVENGERS 67, the cents one is worth more, although I paid the same for each? If so it strikes me as being nothing more than pointless one-upmanship. Besides which, I believe the majority of fans collect the comics they like only because they like them, and not for their supposed investment potential. Certainly the only time I have ever told people the worth of the rarer items in my collection has been to stop friends/family/relatives etc mauling them.

Finally, hasn't 2000 A.D. hit the pits just lately. Isn't Marvel U.K. dreadful. Doesn't a comic called "She-Hulk" sound dreadful, although it could be interesting to see her rip out of her shirt. And I'll refuse to buy a comic called "Disco Dazzler" on principle. Hopefully Gene Simmons will jump all over her and Romita jr in his seven inch spiked boots.

Lilian Edwards

Bem-24 was both the first Bem and the first comic fanzine I had ever read, and in all honesty was possibly one of the most stimulating experiences I have had in a long while. I expect you have heard this sort of reaction from first-time readers before, but it was almost miraculous to discover that here was a group of seemingly intelligent and literate people who actually wanted to read, discuss & criticize comics! From the lettercols of the actual comics, I was aware that it was "alright" in America to read them, but in this country it seemed the usual reaction to the fact that I read comics was somewhere between contempt and amazement -- after all, I was a bright student who had shown no previous signs of brain-damage! Maybe now I can get the courage not to skulk around the comic-racks until there aren't many people about, and then hurriedly make off with my pickings to shamefully face the salesgirl. Incidentally, it struck me as more than coincidence that the main secondary topic to comics in Reaction was homosexuality -- both tastes are minority and non-respectable, preferences gradually becoming more acceptable -- I myself feel I've done the equivalent of "coming out" by writing this letter. And if gay readers think this is a trivialisation of their problems, I don't agree -- it's how embarrassed/ashamed you yourself feel about your condition, whether it be homosexuality, comic-collecting, obesity or whatever, that matters, not the absolute nature of the condition. (I'm not about to go into the hoary old arguments on homosexuality being the done thing in Periclean Athens, etc. etc.)

Getting back to Bem, my principal reaction to Reaction concerned the remarks on fan apathy among collectors; as a qualified observer, so to speak, I'd like to firmly agree with the opinion that comic-collectors are not unwilling to become fans, they simply don't know fandom exists. I myself came upon Bem by pure and convoluted chance -- I attended Faircon 79, a local SF con/organised by Glasgow's fan group FOKT (plug), where I got a free copy of FANTASY TRADER -- in it I found a dealer's address to whom I wrote, and from whom I bought Bem because (a) it was advertised as "Britain's top fanzine", and (b) it brought my order up to a round number. Not exactly a scientific method of discovering fandom.

Anyhow, now I have found it I like it. The advance comics news and reviews were fascinating to me, and six whole pages of letters. ... In my experience the best part of an amateur publication is usually the letter col, and generally the amount of space it gets is inversely proportional to how good it is -- not so here. Of course it's free text for you so you're not being any too altruistic, are you? And incidentally, I like the interweaved comments; they're apt,

informative and not ingratiating, which I hate.

Enough of this maudlin praise; I do have some criticisms. If you really want to expand fandom, you'll have to make coming upon Bem (or any other fanzine, I suppose) a bit less daunting for the first-time reader. Reading Bem-24 was a bit like going to a party where you don't know anyone -- you're torn between a fascination for these interesting people you can hear talking, and a desire to cut and run. It would help a lot if you cut down on some of the unidentified name-dropping and expanded some of the acronyms, even if they are as familiar to you as your own initials -- TSOCE is a case in point, and CMNI, which I misread as OMNI (the glossy SF mag) about three times. You also might try to (very) briefly summarize hot topics of discussion which are well known to you, but about as clear as Watergate politics to the first-time fan. Catholicity was a good example of an article which told me everything I wanted to know about the subject without being tautological. (It would be extremely tedious for the writer and readers-in-the-know to unabbreviate every abbreviation, and it would be almost impossible to summarize some of the arguments. Bear with us, the learning is part of the enjoyment, and besides, think what a smug in-group feeling you'll have when you do know what CMNI and TSOCE stand for.)

Finally, I would like to make a confession and a complaint. In the last couple of years that I have seriously collected comics, after a long spell away, I have concentrated on about 8 DC titles and no Marvel ones. From a fan point of view, I realize that I have done the equivalent of buying Perry Como's records instead of the Bee Gees, but I'd like to explain why. The first comics I bought were those I'd read in my childhood, i.e. Superman, Flash, the Legion -- all DCs. I don't remember ever seeing Marvel 7 or 8 years ago. From these I spread out through most of DC's superhero range. I suppose the natural next step would have been to work my way into the Marvel range. But you see, there were no comics on the racks I frequented bearing the name of any Marvel hero I recognised, like Spider-Man, the Hulk or the Fantastic Four ... instead, all I saw was non-entities like Ms Marvel and Captain America, whom I hated on sight. Then I discovered that Spidey and his ilk were selling as weekly pulp comics -- but as I have already said I am a trifle inhibited about buying comics, and I just couldn't face picking comics out of the Dandy and Beano shelves. Besides I didn't, and don't, want to collect those ephemeral and dog-eared paper comics -- I wanted the coloured American comics, which were about 70% DC.

At the price of comics nowadays (not cheap for 10 minutes reading, no matter what the dollar value is), and with my limited means (student grant), is it worth it to buy comics about whose quality, content or reputation I know nothing -- or was it wiser to stick to series like GL/GA, that I enjoyed and had established a firm hold on? I chose the latter -- I might have been wrong, but do you understand my dilemma? (Maybe Bem can get me out of it -- that's partly why I'm subscribing) I feel it is unfair that I cannot buy coloured editions of Spider-Man etc in this country, short of paying dealers' hyped-up prices, because Marvel UK feels it can make more money out of soaking schoolboys for their pocketmoney with the same material, and I'd like to know if there is any chance of the American non-distributed comics ever getting onto the market here. (Not as long as the GB versions are being published. Ian Penman asked Dez Skinn, the editor of Marvel U.K., if he thought the audiences of the U.S. Marvels and the U.K. Marvels were the same. Dez said they probably weren't. Ian then asked why, therefore, are the U.S. versions not imported with the rest of the Marvel output, seeing that the reason generally given for their non-importing is that they hurt the sales of the U.K. comics. Dez said that he believed that the audience wasn't really interested in such business matters. ...)

Tony Urwin

The shortage of new names in letter columns, regular locers would have us believe, is due to 'fan apathy'. This is an over-simplistic view of the problem. There are several possible reasons for this situation which do not include Michael O'Donoghue's reference to fans being afraid to expose themselves to criticism. If this is true, then comic fans must be an insecure, shy and generally neurotic bunch! Sociologists would love that one. (You're probably right in your appraisal of many comic fans, though whether this is more true of comic fans than the general public is more debatable. An analysis of why comic fans became comic fans (i.e. why we collect things, why the things we collect are comics, why we have spent/so much time immersed in our hobby) would certainly prove interesting.) Dismissing that theory, there are three contributing factors which lead to a possible explanation:

Observation of the fan-scene reveals that there is only a lack of new letter writers in the established fanzines. The smaller, newer ventures appear to attract unfamiliar names. The key is quality. Specifically, Reaction maintains a high standard of literacy (as fanzines go), and presents flowing, rational arguments or opinions. Contributors talk



about how simple it is to write a letter -- of course it is. But to write one that is intelligent, progressive and interesting, while not appearing rambling or broken, is not easy.

Finding a topic which is original and interesting is also difficult. Over ten years of publishing, fanzines have covered considerable ground, and few new areas remain. Discussion is restricted to either new developments in comics, or the resurrection of old, controversial issues in a new light. Witness the current attempt in GRAPHIC SENSE to stir up the tedious, time-worn argument concerning DC versus Marvel. (Therefore, there is no restriction!)

Finally, even when a new topic is introduced into the column, the initial writer discusses it in such great depth that there remains little for the newer/younger fans to comment upon. Any remarks they make will have been said already, either within the context of the original letter or in Mike's often lengthy replies. The few original points remaining in their letters will appear petty and disjointed, thus not warranting a printing.

Returning to the charge of 'fan-apathy': it is an ungrounded accusation. When a person progresses from casually reading comics to retaining those items and buying back issues he becomes a comic collector. If his interest leads him to reading about comics and their creators, then surely it will be strong enough to motivate him to contribute something to a fanzine. If not, then the term 'fan' cannot be applied, and he remains simply a collector. To him comics exist only to be read and hoarded, as a passing fad, whether for investment, enjoyment or whatever. He has no wish to discuss them, and is NOT a part of fandom. Thus estimates of the size of fandom based on the circulation of adzines are too high, including collectors and fans alike. Of course, fans also collect, but this is not the limit of their participation. Fans are not apathetic, only collectors are, who by definition have no desire to become involved in fanzines.

It is also true that collectors will have a greater interest in the financial aspects of comics than will fandom. The most pressing development being the 'higher prices for cents-priced comics' issue. Several fans continually voice their contempt for the commercialism which is infecting fandom, and you, Mike, appear to be carrying the banner. A noble stance. It's sad to admit it, however, but there is no use trying to ignore the monetary side of comics. I find it somewhat hypocritical of fans to state that they exist on a separate plane, totally above this issue, and read comics solely for pleasure. When the time comes to sell off some of

your collection, or that elusive comic appears on Colin Campbell's lists (which appear to be the focal point for everyone's anger), then you can demonstrate your laudable ideals. I love comics, I enjoy rereading and discussing them, but if I pay £30 for CONAN 1 it is also an investment. No comic is worth that amount of money for simply pleasure, unless you are very, very wealthy (So that's your secret Mike -- Colin Campbell is really you! The pseudonym scandal continues.). Sure I loathe the people who ignore the contents of a comic in pursuit of profits, but everyone has some link with the financial position of comics, no matter how small. */(I can't recall how this 'fan apathy' topic arose, but Bem certainly doesn't suffer from it. Without sounding complacent, we receive a large enough amount of locs, so that scarcity of printing space, not scarcity of letters to fill it, is our problem. And there are an acceptable number of new names cropping up.)/*

On a lighter note, I am confused as to Bem's policy regarding new films. That Superman should be thoroughly discussed is a logical extension from the field of comics. Both Star Wars and Close Encounters were also reviewed and discussed, yet both are totally unrelated to comics other than from a science-fiction viewpoint. Conversely Wizards and Lord of the Rings have gone unmentioned, except in reference to Mike Ploog's involvement. Surely these animated features have closer links with comics than the 'SF blockbusters'. Is this a case of selling out to commercialism, or merely a response to reader requests? I suspect the former reason is more likely to be true. */(Dead wrong. Those articles appeared because somebody wrote them, and they were well enough written to merit printing them. Martin didn't commission them, for either of the reasons you mention.)/*

Lord of the Rings is not enjoying the box-office success of the two SF giants. There are several possible explanations. Perhaps foremost is the limited appeal of animation and fantasy compared with live-action and science-fiction. There are two main categories of film-goers who would view the film -- those who have read Tolkien's work, and those who have heard of his reputation. The film fails with both sections. No attempt to film the book could appease the former group, because no visual production could hope to recreate the sweeping landscapes and depth of characterisation, in total, the completely believable world created by Tolkien. The very success of the novel lay in the slow, painstakingly detailed approach to developing the characters and building up a world, as the quest progressed. Each individual reader creates a mental picture of the characters and scenes, in short becomes involved with the nine companions. Naturally when Bakshi shatters your visions by presenting his version of 'how things should look' you become critical and defensive. The irony is that only readers could even follow the film. To try and condense over 1000 pages containing a vast array of important characters and complex plots into two 2½ hour long films results in total confusion -- thus the film fails to entertain the second group, the casual viewers. They are witness to events progressing at a rapid rate with a minimal amount of explanation. The film cuts from one important scene to the next with no continuity, and the linking dialogue does not clarify the situation. Whole characters are omitted, and even the fundamental nature of the quest is obscured.

Even allowing for the difficulties in converting a mammoth book into a film does not excuse the complete absence of characterisation. All the hobbits are interchangeable, with perhaps the exception of Sam, who is presented as a foolish, simple bumpkin and progresses no further, in complete opposition to his role in the book.

The only redeeming factor is the animation itself, although this is also very inconsistent. The portrayal of the black riders is excellent, and the 'Flight to the Ford' surpassed the corresponding chapter in the novel. In contrast, some of the battle scenes using live-action footage appeared shoddy and unrealistic. In particular, in

the scene where Pippin and Merry fight alongside Boromir against the orcs, the substitution of live actors for the animated hobbits is glaringly obvious, ruining the continuity of the film.

Perhaps Bakshi should have attempted a less ambitious adaptation, taking into consideration the limitations of animation. A novel featuring the adventures of a lone hero (Conan?) and fewer large-scale battles would have been more viable. Lord of the Rings is a great literary achievement, and should remain in the written form. Of course there is still Part Two, for the optimists among us. */(That's twice ('Fritz the Cat' being the first) Bakshi has missed the heart of the matter, though he was taking an almighty risk with such a complex and well-loved book. Regarding Conan, the live-action, big-budget version is proceeding well, according to Jim Steranko, who has had some hand in it (sets visualization?))*

Ivo Jerry Steyn

It certainly was an atypical Bem in some respects, that Bem-25. It reminded me a bit of the historical (well, it was the first Bem I read, so if that isn't history ...) Bem-20. At the

moment I don't know if I'm completely happy with a Bem consisting of about 50% strips -- but they were good strips. "Planet Tale" I liked the best, because its atmosphere reminded me so much of all those Eric Frank Russell stories. It seemed to be a deliberate tribute to the Fortean who never wrote a bad story in his life (anyone remember "Diabologic"?)

I tho't I thaw a puddly that in Worlds of Emlock, but it turned out to be something even more surprising: a brief review of 1984 issue 7. Good grief, an actual acknowledgement of the existence of other publishing companies! And Mike Cruden even ventured to give an Opinion on 1984, one that I largely agreed with. Will wonders never cease? To be frank, I seem to recall the Honourable Emlock reviewing the excellent CEREBUS THE AARDVARK, so he can't be all bad. The point I want to make is that I think attention is fixed on three subjects in Bem: DC, Marvel and homegrown, and that's really too limiting in these days. Howabout HEAVY METAL, graphic novels, even Warrens? */(I'm afraid it's a case of getting what you deserve. If a reader is interested enough to open a discussion on any of the topics you mention, I'd probably take it up. But "What about Warrens" isn't quite the opening that's necessary. What about Warrens?)*

I find it incredible that so many people go completely over the top in praising Marvel's latest hit, THE MICRONAUTS. Come on, it's enjoyable, but don't start comparing it with the other prestige-comics with a mere ten issues to go on. If you can lay your hands on a copy of The Comics Journal 49, read the critique of the comic in it, and try to be honest when you formulate your reaction. (There's also a terrific article about the X-Men in there. Sorry to intrude on Ed Sallis' domain, but I'm very enthusiastic about that article.)

I wonder what happened to Chris Ash during his schooldays? Whatever, it has scarred him frightfully in his opinion about teachers. Come on, some people do not understand things by merely reading about them, and need someone to explain it to them. Most people do, in fact, so teachers are necessary. You may not have liked yours, but there are a lot of good ones around.

Hey, Kathleen, am I getting paranoid or are Marvel slowly working their way towards an addition to the Vision/Witch family? I still think it would be completely natural for the Vision to father children; he is a synthetic man, not a synthetic eunuch. While I share Mike's dislike of 1984, I don't think Corben is completely excused from the 'porn dressing as comics' syndrome, though his Sindbad was very chaste, compared to Neverwhere. And they've even started publishing 1984 in Holland now. Yuck. */(I find a lot of difference between the porn (next question: what's pornography) in, for example, 'Den', wherein it's*



presented straightforwardly, and is very plausibly a part of a story, and that typical of 1984, wherein it is made the centre of coy, prurient attention, and is often the whole artificial basis of the story.)'

Mike: stop throwing in those incredibly arrogant expressions like "casual 12-year old buyer". They are not completely idiotic, you know. */(Would you have let me get away with it if I'd stuck the word "typical" in front of "casual"?)*

Last remark to Mike: I do not agree with your views on Mind-Tampering. You see, everything can be called mind-tampering. Discussions, where people are trying to change your opinion on something. Requests are often made to achieve a certain reaction in the person asked, and, as such, can be called mind manipulations. The fact that Moondragon chose a somewhat more direct way is an example of a practical mind at work. It is hypocrisy to condemn her method, and to praise a method which has the same effect but uses a thinly disguised form of psychological warfare. So there. */(At least those thinly disguised forms of psychological warfare, in which we're all indulging (I never quite thought of a discussion in those terms before) allow the victim the chance of denial, or compromise.)*

Somehow I get the idea that if some of you met Wolverine in actual life you would shoot him and send his head to a laboratory to have it examined for rabies. How's about some effort to understand his motivations? */(According to Kathy and Mr. Claremont, his motivation is that he's crazy)*



Dave Harwood By gumboil that Bem-26 was one heckuva fanzine! And now I've got my eyeballs back from their 30,000-word service, I will have a bash at commenting-- no easy task with such a wealth of material to consider.

The size of Bem-26 came as a very pleasant surprise; this is the way for Bem to go, and to heck with typesetting-- who needs it, anyway?

The cover was effective and eyecatching, although I always tend to feel a little uneasy about these 'done in the style of' pieces. No reservations about Russ N's skilful and novel handling of the colour overlays. Alan Cookson's article was a well-written appreciation, though I must admit to being one of those yet to sample the delights of The First Kingdom. My feelings coincided very closely with Alan's when I first leafed through a copy somewhere or other; I found the 'look' of the thing very off-putting and hence, in my case, didn't buy. Maybe I was being, too hasty.

Lotsa other good reading too. Katholicity maintained its current high standard --Kath obviously really cares about what goes into these funny little magazines that so entertain us, and I wonder if she has ever considered actually writing a comic strip. I'm sure it couldn't be less than interesting (and if she needed a volunteer to draw it...).

Sigh was-- um-- yes, well...

While reading Howard Siegel's piece, which I enjoyed, it struck me how little we see of this kind of historical article these days. In the early days there seemed to be at least one in every fanzine that appeared; I wonder why they went out of fashion? Or maybe they didn't, maybe it's just that any kind of formal article is a much less common phenomenon. On the other hand, lettercolumns are certainly thriving --the latter perhaps the cause of the former? /(Perhaps the reason is that the history articles are harder to write, involving extensive research. Or perhaps that it requires quite a considerable collection (eg of Warlock, Capt. Marvel, or Creeper) to enable anybody to write such an article.)/

Reaction: Caramba, what a monster! Not that I'm complaining, mind you--quite the opposite. Without a shadow of a doubt Reaction has become the best lettercol in fandom, bar none, and it's almost ironic that people are suddenly worrying about Bem becoming 'too professional' (and hence by implication losing its 'fannishness'), while it's offering more of an opportunity for people to contribute than ever before. And that, surely, is exactly what a fanzine should be doing. Conversely, you were a bit short on spotillos this time; none on hand, or were you simply tryin' to cram in as much text as possible? /(The latter --also an experiment to see how having some pages 100% text would work! There's no law to say each page needs art. -ML)/

"You can't please all the people..." It's not until your own work is under consideration that you realise just how true that old adage is. However, as long as I managed to please some, I'm content. What happened to the potential shown in Beem and RDH Comics? Nothing; it merely changed direction. Besides, us creative types can't be expected to conform to the desires of others.

Seriously, many people thought (incorrectly) that RDHC was, or tried to be, 'experimental', and whereas it may, perhaps, have turned out a little different from the norm of fan mags of that time, such was never a deliberate intention. It is true though that I had rather more

grandiose ambitions about the kind of work I wanted to produce then than is now the case; I soon realised I was never going to be the next Neal Adams or whoever, and I grew increasingly disenchanted with the art I was capable of producing. As a result, for about six years I almost totally eschewed any comics-related work.

When I did eventually try my hand again it was with a completely different, and much more realistic, intent. In effect my concentration is focussed solely on improving my actual drawing and my grasp of comic-strip technique. It is only when (if) these aspects are mastered that I'll consider such peripheral considerations as style and innovation. I wish only to portray any script I receive as clearly and in as direct a manner as I can; I have neither the ability nor desire to do more. It's simply a case of recognising one's limitations, and making the best of what one's got. Incidentally, Mike, I don't think of myself as a "fan artist". Make of that what you will. /(Perhaps it's a case of learning to walk before you desire to run, otherwise you stumble. And other assorted clichés.)/

In the case of 'Cliff' I think it fair to point out that this was very atypical of Eddie's recent work. We simply decided it might be interesting for me to ink his pencils, so he came up with a story he thought would appeal to me (especially the superhero/sf elements, which Eddie wouldn't normally dream of writing about). His own work is very different indeed, though it owes nothing to his Beem days, but Eddie shows a marked reluctance to submit it to a fanzine so it's unlikely you'll ever get to see it. Mind you, if it did see print Stephen McGonagle would really throw a fit.

On the more general subject of fan strips, Martin Longley might be surprised to learn that I agree with him to some extent (he should remember that neither 'Cliff' nor 'Planet Tale' was done with fanzine publication in mind), though less than I might once have done. The main problem is the disparity between high-minded theory, i.e. that fan strips should present material not found in the mainstream, and what the fan artists/writers themselves wish to do, or are capable of doing. It should not be too surprising that people who gained their impetus to write or draw from mainstream comics should in turn produce work that is a reflection of that inspiration--and is it unreasonable to assume that this is also what many (most?) fanzine readers want to see? I don't know, I'm just asking.

Mike suggests that fanzines could showcase the work of the underground fraternity among us, and indeed there's no reason why they shouldn't. But not exclusively. Many comic fans do not include the u/gs in their list of required reading, myself included. My feeling is that the freedom the u/gs offer is too often merely used in self-indulgent exercises, for it takes a real touch of genius to dispense with all the rules/formulae of comics and still come up with something worthwhile/readable/absorbing.

To confuse the issue further, there are now 'overground' magazines like 1994, the Marvel black & whites, and Heavy Metal, which provide 'adult' and/or avant garde material, so I'm not really sure this idea of fan strips providing some alternative (alternative to what?) is relevant any more. Also, any demand for adult, sophisticated fanzine strips presumes the existence of writers capable of producing such work. Whereas we seem to accept that fan art will be less polished than professional work, it possibly needs pointing out that writing comics is just as much

a skilled, specialised craft/art.

Humour strips, such as those provided by Chris Ash, Paul Jay, Terry Moore, et al, will probably continue to retain an unchallenged place in fanzines (and in many cases deservedly so), but serious strips seem to have a harder time of it. Perhaps therefore some suggestions are in order; with Bem's expanded page count now allowing for the inclusion of more strip work without incurring the displeasure of the readers, I'm sure Martin would appreciate some guidelines on what to look out for. /(I don't think it's reasonable to expect fans to be happy with inferior versions of mainstream comics, and that's what they are often presented with, often because of the egotistic vanity of the publisher/creator. "Inside Story" and "Cliff" are both different enough to be innocent from that criticism, though I had my doubts about the former at first. A mainstream type story can be found in mainstream comics; something somewhat different ought to be showcased in fanzines. Something different needn't mean underground (i.e. some combination of sex, drugs, or rock and roll), though it often does. It can also mean an off-beat look at the super-hero biz, satirical or straight. I wonder how Kathy G. feels.)/

Mike, you took my comments on serious art in comics far more seriously than they deserved, or than I meant them-- heck, I even got Enric Sio's name wrong. I wasn't expressing my real feelings, or rather not my complete feelings, so much as suggesting an alternative for consideration. In fact I was, I admit, a little disappointed that my previous missives on this subject had apparently not registered with you at all. Still, I was glad you pointed out it was the stories (plus art) that prompted your initial suggestions, since the thing that really makes a case for comics as a valid art form is not the individual components, but the gestalt of story and art, plus all the other elements that are unique to comics. /(I apologise for not remembering your previous opinions on art (from Panelologist?). Perhaps you could reiterate the main points for the benefit of newer, and more forgetful, readers. Hell, I can't even remember what I said in those Panelologists!)/

However, I sometimes worry that this preoccupation with the elite of the comics world underrates the value of the majority of good, solid workhorses in the profession. Mind you, fandom has always been tainted by a type of arrogance which seems to presume the comics industry is there for its benefit alone, with the result that any professional who makes no pretence at producing Art, and who pays no heed to the tastes/demands of fandom, is often at best ignored and at worst dismissed as a 'hack'. The latter of course being meant as a term of derision, whereas in a commercial sense it is no such thing. Not surprisingly in the light of my own comic strip preoccupations I can actually find more of interest in the work of those whose approach is straightforward, direct and not particularly stylised (for instance, Nestor Redondo, Russ Heath, Dave Gibbons), simply because their approach is more relevant to what I'm trying to do myself.

I think there's far more worth in such artists' work than many fans give it credit for. /(You're undoubtedly correct. There's no denying the craftsmanship and skill of all comics artists, being competent artists and storytellers, but those who do it with style are more interesting to those of us who are talentless (artistically) ourselves, and are therefore more concerned with what is drawn, rather than how it is drawn.)/



KEVIN
O'NEILL

HUNT EMMERSON





Bill Mantlo In K. Williams' review of THE MICRONAUTS, he (or she) totally missed the point regarding the class structure on Homeworld. It was Baron Karza who divided society into rich and poor. Prior to his tyranny, Homeworld was a socialist Utopia "guided" but not ruled by a benevolent monarchy. Strip length and the period I covered in the first twelve issues did not, unfortunately, allow me to delve into Homeworld's past, but I thought from the hints I did drop that the social status was evidently a change wrought by Baron Karza.

Furthermore, only two Micronauts (not three) are of royal birth: Acroyear and Mari, and Acroyear only because on the day he was born a mystical comet (see MICRONAUTS #12) sacred to the Acroyear race passed overhead, thus prompting the populace of Spartak to hail Acroyear as their King. Of course, they could have chosen Acroyear's brother Shaitan, but though Acroyear's twin, Shaitan was born an albino, cursed by the ebony-skinned Spartakian race--a civil rights issue they'll have to work on one of these days.

Secondly (or is it thirdly), while I was influenced by any number of sources (and what writer isn't), including Kirby's Fourth World series, I resent the canard that I "swiped" anything from anyone. This is typical fannishness -- condemn a book you like because you somewhere read that reviewers are supposed to be nasty buggers. And, since Williams stated more than once that he (she) liked THE MICRONAUTS, I must assume that the above was his (her) motive in bitching about a book he (she) enjoyed.

Two more points: Michael Golden's nice artwork was special because it was new, unusual, fascinating -- and because, like myself, Michael truly cared about THE MICRONAUTS...and that feeling is rare in comics these days. It is also the reason Howie Chaykin's stuff looks so uninspired. He didn't care. With MICRONAUTS #19 Pat Broderick takes over, and I can state unequivocally that the art will be as interesting as it was when done by Michael.

And, far from being right wing, I doubt you will find a more progressive writer in comics today.

By the way, thanks to Steven Green for

his nice review of HOWARD THE DUCK #1. / (Isn't it gratifying to see a pro writer being concerned enough to take the time and effort to comment on remarks made in the fan press. I'm still not convinced about your literary abilities, Bill, but there's no denying your commitment.) /

Chris Ash

I dutifully refrained from writing to the last Bem as a self-regulatory check on overexposure in Reaction, but, as Nat Soper said to the Thompson Organisation, "this is no way to get my subscription extended." I won't dwell on the number of misinterpretations made of remarks in my previous letters, nor will I reply to Dean Smith as, with any luck, my letter in Bem-25 has already done that.

I will wholeheartedly endorse Gordon Smith's comments on letter interruptions, though. What young Gordon has spotted is merely another symptom of the "teacher mentality". Interrupting letters is, clearly, an extension of the scribbling-red-biro-in-the-margin technique, freed from its normal constraints of illegibility and a 1/4" column. I'm amazed Mike doesn't give each letter marks out of ten. / (How do you know I don't?) /

Not quite sure why P. Greenaway sent me a copy of 'Magus' with this issue, other than the fact that his "self portrait" on the cover was lifted from a drawing I did of him for 'Comic Review'. Phil has a good point about comic-sniffing, though. Back in the '60's (here I go again), the smell of a comic was an integral part of the reading experience. Not only that, but DC and Marvel comics actually smelt different in those days, as Daredevil would no doubt be the first to tell you.

Regarding Mike Taylor's remarks about snobbery, the comics-related periodicals I buy regularly are 'The Comics Journal' and 'The Spirit'. I also have subscriptions to 'Bem' and (fool that I am) 'The Panelologist'. I buy 'The Hulk' when it includes Moon Knight, and occasionally scour around marts for reasonably-priced, good condition 60's DC's ('Atom', 'MiS', 'JLA' and 'Hawkman') and Marvels (harder to find at reasonable prices). The last book I bought was the Dragon's Dream 'Dan Dare' reprint (highly recommended), and I pick up the odd current DC (usually 'JLA') and Marvel. Every purchase, other than fanzines, I regard as an investment for the future, but I never buy anything I wouldn't want to read myself.

There is an attitude prevalent in fandom that a collection isn't a collection unless it's a complete run. Such fans are being cleverly manipulated by commercial corruptions of the collector principle. Why, for instance, should a collector need to acquire the Jack Schiff 'Adam Strange' stories when all he really wants are the Julie Schwartz ones. The only series I decided to collect a complete run of was the Marvel version of 'Captain Marvel', but the team of Drake/Heck/Tartaglione soon put a stop to that. I had to throw away their three contributions, closely followed by the two Dick Ayers jobs. It may surprise people to learn that I even threw away 'GL/GA' #76 due to trendy, ham-fisted dialogue and drab inking. Let no one accuse me of collecting comics for solely-financial reasons.

There was a time when I would have been proud to say I did buy every Marvel comic published but, over the last ten years, Marvel have broken so many promises, reneged on so many commitments, and generally thrown so much away that, as far as I'm concerned, 'Epic Illustrated' may well be their last stand...just so long as they don't make it too glossy.

How many marks out of ten, Mike? / (Two stars, actually. The only complete runs I've got are of relatively short-run titles, such as 'Hawk and Dove'. Perhaps it's a symptom of the maturing collector, who acquires enough sense of perspective to decide what he does or doesn't want in his collection, coupled with the necessity of being selective caused by an ever-increasing volume of comics.

By the way, how do you reconcile using only one side of your writing paper with today's world of dwindling resources?) /

Barry K. Winetrobe Much thanks for Bem 26, a vast improvement on the previous transitional issue. Nobody can complain about

value-for-money this time; I've rarely seen such a "full" fanzine. Put in a couple more new features or columnists to follow up the recent innovation of full-length strips, and you'll have a really great zine.

Mike, you asked last issue, in the process of making my "intended-to-be-constructive" letter sound like fan-ed envy on Bem's success, what are the aims of Vertigo? Simple; to provide another fanzine for fandom, hopefully informative, witty, thoughtful and interesting; to give scope for new fanwriters who may feel (however wrongly) that they'll never get into the "Biggies"; to provide, ideally, a fanzine that complements zines like Bem, CU & GS, a fanzine that readers of these major mags can also purchase for a different viewpoint on fandom and comicdom. Phew! There you are, Mike, I hope that doesn't sound too pompous, but I genuinely would like Vertigo to be an appropriate second fanzine purchase for fans! Time will tell. / (Not too pompous at all. Do you adopt a definite policy of ensuring that Vertigo's topics are different from those in the Big Three, or that it provides different viewpoints on the same old subjects?) /

On to the main point of my letter. You have been inquiring over recent months about the purposes of a comics society (like the late TSOCE). Well, I wouldn't wish to state an exhaustive list of functions, but how's this for one? An umbrella organisation of fan-eds, dealers, shops, fans etc could take steps to bring more comics-buyers into fandom. One obvious way would be to publicise mainstream fandom through the line of Marvel UK mags. This could be achieved by a published letter, or by a small advertisement. The latter shouldn't be prohibitively expensive if sponsored by those who stand to benefit from an increased clientele--viz dealers, shops, zine publishers and so on. Even a levy on entry to the next Central Hall Mart of say 10p or 20p would raise quite a bit towards the cost of an ad.

I recall reading a recent publishers' yearbook which gave the circulation of the old Marvel weeklies as around 86,000. I doubt if more than 1 or 2% of these readers are true, participating fans. Even if an ad or letter only brought in 5% more people, that would be an influx of around 4000 new fans!

An organising committee could arrange a standard-form reply to all responses garnered by the ad/letter, giving details of existing shops, mail-order dealers, fanzines, and forthcoming marts.

How about it? / (Sounds a brill idea. It has been tried several times before--Marts have been publicized via the British Marvels, as have numerous fanzines--which isn't to say that it shouldn't be tried again. All it needs is a bit of co-operation between Martin, Gez, and Alan to place a joint ad, or some initiative from one of them.) /

Dave Wishart On the subject of different prices for comics, depending on whether the cover is marked in pence or cents; well, there's something to be said for both sides. Collectors are an idiosyncratic lot, and some, if they're collecting American comics, will want them as they appear in America, i.e. with cents on the cover. I personally regard this as taking things a bit too far—the criterion I go for is the condition of the comic. I can't honestly see the point of forking out 35p (the price of a 40c comic in Forever People, my nearest shop — an excellent one, the high price of 40c comics being the only knock in an otherwise very friendly and informed shop), when I can get the same comic for 12p. Perhaps I should begin to, looking at the latest list from Colin Campbell; HOWARD THE DUCK #1 at £8.00 or £1.75, some difference, and one totally unjustified from my point of view. Okay, maybe 50p difference, or even a quid, but £6.25? No way.

Incidentally, if Dean Smith is reading, despite his little quirks, Colin runs an extremely competitive mail-order system whereby you can take your 40c comic prices down to about 14p, if you put in a fairly big order. How's that for cheap imports?

As for the improved image of Bem, I can't see anything wrong in trying to look more and more professional; CMN towards the end of its run was looking every bit as good as the most professional of its American counterparts (TCR, RBCC, & TCJ). If Bem can keep the flag flying by keeping to this kind of quality, then you have my best wishes, and if you need to sell at 45p, then I'll continue forking out. With the news available from TCR, we're assured of competent reporting in that department — but more interviews, pretty please? (At the time of writing, I'm half way through typing up a long Paul Levitz interview, and I've been halfway through it for the last month. But, Sue adds one more rôle to those she already has as she completes a typing course, and promises to give me a hand — i.e. do it for me. where would we be without the little ladies, eh? Put the axe down, Kath. Looking at The Comics Journal, however, makes me wonder why the Americans can achieve such a high literary, and perceptive, standard and we can't. Such articles/in-depth reviews as Alan Cookson's in the last issue are a step in the right direction, but they are very much the exception. Ian Penman said to me recently that British fandom hasn't made any progress in the last ten years. In other words, Bem-26 isn't appreciably any better than Armageddon #4. American fandom, on the other hand, with the appearance of The Comics Journal, is years ahead of us. Comments?)/

Mike Taylor "Mike Golden draws like a son of a bitch." No, they're not my words, they are Mike Kaluta's, but I would agree with them up to a point. Bem readers have often stated how good they think Golden is, but I think they may be confusing good draughtsmanship with style. Now I like his art, the style is flowing and easy on the eye, and the layouts are often imaginative, but as an actual draughtsman I wouldn't rate him higher than say Staton, Sal Buscema, or Jim Mooney. He certainly can't compare with the often criticised work of John Buscema. Style is what makes or breaks an artist. If an artist hasn't got a very distinctive and recognizable style, then no matter how good an artist he is, his

work is largely ignored by fandom. If an artist has the necessary originality of presentation, then he can often bluff his way through, even if his drawing isn't that sound. Golden is a bluffer. Having said that, I should add that I look forward to seeing future work by Mr Golden. (Are you sure you really mean draughtsmanship, which to me means internal panel arrangement and panel layout on the page. Perhaps the basics of comic art are (A): draughtsmanship (which includes continuity), (B): basic figure work (anatomy), and (C): style. Gil Kane is very strong on all three. Steranko and Golden are strong on A and C, Sal Buscema is strong on A, okay on B, but totally lacking in C. What do you mean by draughtsmanship?)/

This subject ties in slightly with the comment that you made at the end of my letter in Bem-26. Yes, you often can tell whether or not a comic is good or bad by looking at the credits, but by relying on this method you may be being very unfair to the people involved. Once people have achieved a reputation among fandom, they are stuck with that reputation. Sal Buscema for instance is known for boringly conventional layouts and unexciting, if competent art. His work on ROM 1, however, was quite decent, and while it wouldn't have made Adams flinch, it was certainly worth looking at. But how many people gave it a chance? The classic example must be from a couple of weeks ago, when I was working in Nostalgia & Comics. One kid was leafing through a comic, trying to decide whether or not to buy it. I heard him say to his comrade "The art's good...oh, it's by Jim Mooney. He did the Omega things. I don't like him" (more or less his exact words). He then put the comic (Man-Thing #1) back, and left. (It's true that it's unfortunate for a highly creative writer like Gerber to have to work with a hack like Mooney (although Gerber has stated that he enjoys working with Mooney, perhaps because his straightforward style doesn't impede the story), because his work may be ignored by the fans—I didn't buy Omega at first because of Mooney's presence — but if an artist has earned himself a reputation as boring, then it's the writer's decision whether to work with him or not. Presumably, Gerber felt it was more important to make Omega appeal to the mass market, rather than just to fandom.)/

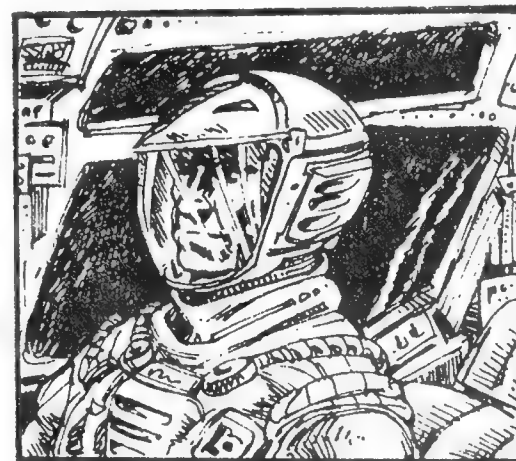
Oh, and before I turn to a less boring subject, I'd just like to disagree with the majority of Bem's readership by saying that, from the work I've seen (Iron Man, Micronauts, Rom, and others), I feel that Bill Mantlo is one of the least-inspired, cliché-ridden writers employed by Marvel at the present time.

But onto Bem itself. Bem-26 was a mildly magnificent lesson in the art of fanzine publishing. It's so near perfect, that instead of rattling off a long list of what's right with it, I'll mention the few niggly faults you need to eliminate to bring it up to even greater heights.

Firstly, abandon the type-setting. It's true that a type-set page is slightly neater than a type-written one, and it's very nice to see one's name in beautiful type-set blue, but the difference it makes is not really all that much. The typing in Bem has always been, at the worst, legible, and it did allow last-minute inclusions. The trouble with type-setting is that the deadline is brought forward to a ridiculously long time before the zine actually comes out. Also, there are too many spelling mistakes. Now, I'm hardly a master of literary application, but my own zine, Masters of Infinity (only 30p plus p&p, whoops...sorry!) is type-written, and I pride myself that in issue

2 there were only one or two mistakes. The same goes for certain other typewritten zines; that's how it should be. That's how Bem used to be. Typesetters, however, do not seem to share our respect for the English language — both Bem and Graphic Sense have had an increased number of errors since the typesetting revolution. I realise that you'll hardly decide to change back merely because of this letter, but it may produce results to ask Bem's readership which they prefer. (Hmm... Perhaps. What do you say, Ed Martin? I agree about the increase in errors. The silly sods missed out a whole phrase in my reply at the end of page 21, the phrase being "is not replying at all".)/

Geez, this letter's getting too serious. In fact, there was a slight lack of humour in Bem-26. Katholicity was down to earth and serious (but good), as were most of the letters in Reaction. The only thing left is Thundermole which, to quote Martin Longley, contains "No plot...no characterization...no humour." But no, Martin, that's not good, that's pointless. What ever happened to the witty, satirical Thundermole we all used to know and love?



Oh, damn, I'm getting serious again.

The majority of Bem was excellent though — better than all previous issues, which is no mean feat. Good grief, Reaction has increased to 7 pages. Smart move. "Inside Story" was superb, and probably rates as the best regular fan strip currently being produced. Excellent cover, which actually referred to an inside article. I shall certainly sample 'The First Kingdom', as suggested by Alan Cookson. The only fault I would find with the cover is that the colours used didn't appeal to me, but I suppose that's a matter of personal taste. (Is it, or could one objectively say that orange and yellow do not blend well together?)/

Colin Gould

What a relief Reaction was to me! No longer will I have to sit alone in the attic, an abject figure in a tattered

raincoat, with an early STRANGE TALES pressed to my nostrils. No longer will I have to wander the unfriendly streets of this city seeking out a squalid cellar in the Chinese quarter where I can give vent to my peculiarity. No longer will I have to slip unseen into one of the cubicles of a public toilet for a quick sniff of an old FF. Thank you, oh thank you, Phil Greenaway. At last I can sit comfortably in front of the television, in full view of family and friends, and partake of those exquisite aromas exuded by my old comics. I'm glad my affliction is not uncommon; I feel a burden lifted from my shoulders.

My dream is of the day when I can go to a mart and have the choice of AMAZING ADULT FANTASY in three flavours. The smell of cheese and onion, peppermint, or pickle while I read... My mouth's watering, and my nose is running just thinking about it!

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Bill Thomson Three years ago, at the age of 19-going-on-20, I began to slowly re-immense myself in a long-lost childhood passion: comics.

I suppose I was fortunate; the mag I picked up out of curiosity (how much had things changed since my last comic back in '68?) was DEFENDERS #38, which immediately catapulted me into a world of floating brains, Headmen, Bozos, baby deer... This was weird stuff: have comics really evolved this much? HOWARD THE DUCK #5 said "yes", OMEGA THE UNKNOWN #2 begged the question, DAREDEVIL #136 said "no"; so I did the obvious, and concentrated only on comics that boasted the by-line "Steve Gerber". Of course, such exclusivity couldn't last. Steadily, other titles began to trickle into my collection -- and more importantly, my eye began to be caught by some rather splendid artwork. Gulacy on MASTER OF KUNG FU, Starlin's WAPLOCK, Perez on AVENGERS... Yes, there was more to comics than Gerber, and not all of it was as hacky as the Wolfman & Brown effort on the Man Without Fear. For two years, I toddled on, picking up more and more titles, filling in gaps, incurring the ridicule of family and friends, discovering "Dark They Were", Manchester's "Bookchain", Marts (is there anywhere in Liverpool, and if so, can someone give me any information?), and finally, about a year ago, Bem and this peculiar substratum called Fandom.

Over the past few months, I've sat on the side-lines, a quietly amused spectator while the eccentric (but, I'm sure, lovable) types debated homosexuality, the morality or otherwise of some Neal Adams strip, Wolverine's psychosis, and now the "value" of comics priced in cents. My own view of this latter controversy is the ridiculously romantic notion that what goes on between the covers, not the little box in the top, is what matters. Oh, the shame of being a mere "reader of comic books" that can be "obtained as cheaply as possible"! Dare I show my face in "Dark They Were" again? Will I be pointed at and laughed at at Marts? Let's wait and see!

Just in passing, I wonder if the shrewd Mr Alexander could spot a "facsimile" with a cents cover cunningly substituted for the pence version?

In the same way that Yes and E.L.P. used to sweep the board in the Melody Maker polls, the X-Men carry all before them in the Eagle Awards: block votes rule OK-- but is it OK? To my mind, the mutants are at present coasting along on momentum from past glories; there have been no really outstanding issues since the Magneto wrap-up, and, whilst Claremont has obviously found his niche on this book, his work elsewhere isn't really the standard we'd expect from an Eagle winner. /(Chris the C has done wonders for Marvel Team-Up -- I thought the first chapter of his Widow/Fury series was particularly good, though it did tend to lose its way somewhat.)/

Terry Austin is by far the most gifted of what I think of as "conventional" inkers (producing photo-ready pencils; filling in backgrounds--as opposed to the "Philippino" style of also adding depth, dimension and tones), but he is lucky in that he works almost exclusively with pencillers of the highest calibre, most noticeably Rogers and Byrne, neither of whom suffer unduly when Austin's inks are absent. It would be interesting to see now Terry would cope with one of the, shall we say, less gifted pencillers -- a Heck or a Frank Robbins -- certainly his work over Tuska in CAPTAIN MARVEL #54 gives little indication that he could equal Leialoha's miracle in making a Sal

Buscema-drawn comic the most beautiful on the racks for four months running. Amazing that the Hawaian did not make the short-list. /(Austin does add a certain amount of himself to his work, in his addition of tones, but certainly not as much as Leialoha, or Palmer, or such more traditional artists as John Severin or Wood. I wonder whether the penciller is more or less pleased (or indifferent, in some cases) to see his work altered so much. Leialoha most certainly does deserve some sort of award for what he managed to do with Sal Buscema's pencils in those four issues of MARVEL TEAM-UP.)/

I can't say that I can complain about Byrne or the other victors, but Judge Dredd as Favourite British Comic Character? Yes, it is the most readable and provocative of domestic strips, but is this a man to have as favourite, and by implication admirable, British character? Conan may be immoral (for all I know -- I can't stand the rag), but the Judge is worse--amoral. Whilst morality and immorality stem from a certain set of values, often interchangeable, amorality is the absence of any values, and thus any act can be committed without any sticky considerations of "morality", "conscience", and "legitimacy" interfering. Dredd is a tool, a puppet, accountable to no higher authority other than "duty". Possessing no internal values of "right", "wrong", "good", or "evil", he is no more than a law 'n' order automaton; a man whose only analogue in the "real" world can be the concentration camp mentality. "Only obeying orders..." -- and this is a hero to today's kids? I can only hope that Dredd's eminence is due to the paucity of equally well executed strips; but if someone has tapped a subconscious seam of the collective psyche... /(Amoral means unconcerned with external morals, and that does not preclude evolving a set of morals of one's own. Thus, Conan and Judge Dredd act according to their own moral code, and they are so appealing because their morals are much simpler, virtually black-and-white, compared to the grey morals and justice of the outside world. Everyone likes to see evildoers punished, rather than escape scotfree because they have hired hotshot lawyers or because their friends are top civil servants.)/

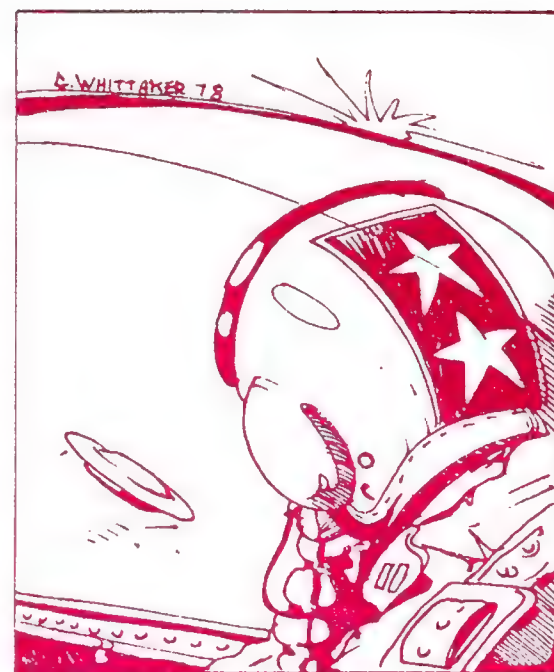
Paul Strout I thank you from the deepest recesses of my heart. The day before my journey to London I received Bem-26 through the post. I read Alan Cookson's article on Jack Katz's 'First Kingdom' and was intrigued--intrigued enough to buy the first three issues from 'Dark They Were...' the following day.

I have just finished reading them, or, rather, experiencing them, and feel totally moved by Mr Katz's intriguing script and astounding art.

If Bem had arrived one post later (we only get one per day up here), I would never have discovered 'The First Kingdom'. I think it was an omen. For the first time in many months I feel peaceful. As I said, I am moved.

Ayatollah Khomani Well Marty, I'm writing this from my Fortress of Solitude -- not only to preserve the ritual of our holy festival, but also 'cause it's the only place an Ayatollah can get away from them dumb-ass students these days.

By the time you read this, the infidel damn yankees may already have given in to our demands, or had another computer error with their atomic bombs. Either way, you



see now that I was perfectly justified to knock off ruling the country for those couple of days it took me to attend the Comicon. Sure was fun meeting your Wendy little pals, though Allah knows how I'd have got through the days without my personal supply of firewater. What prices! I mean, come off it, Campbell! You think an ayatollah makes as much as a pope?

And since we ain't on the best of terms with the infidel Americans at the moment, I hope some enterprising chap will import a few copies of Mike Fleisher's novel. I really can't understand why his MAN-THING was such a dead loss... I hope he ain't doing a Gerry Conway. I mean, back in the old days Conway wrote 80% crap. Then fans started slagging him, and the old infidel's up to 100 per... know what I mean?

Hey! Like I really dig the idea of Hamlet as Superman. By the way, did you know Will the Shake invented Batman? It's true! Remember that story where Bruce's dying grandfather berates Brucie for being a disgrace to the family? Well, the whole idea of the useless raving pansy being a tough mean son of the revolution first turned up in Henry IV part 1. Prince Hal says "I shall hereafter be more myself, and in the closing of some glorious day be bold to tell you that I am your son when I will wear a garment all of blood." And all that stuff too about his bad behaviour being like the dark clothes Joanna Lumley wears to make her hair look blonde. Incidentally, did you know that Joanna's going to have an operation to have fat removed from her bottom? Amazing what you read in the TV Times.

I think the "Mystery Man" episode of Hulk was a step in the right direction. Too many of the Inspector Charles Laughton figures in these American Les Miserables type series have been dull, dull, dull. Only Falconetti in "Rich Man, Poor Man Book Two", Travis in the first series of "Blake's Seven", and now McGee in "The Incredible Hulk" have had any degree of sympathy about them, and it's a pity really that McGee couldn't just have stayed on the run with Banner, since he'd certainly have been an interesting variation on the Rick Jones/Jim Slave of the Americans character.

Anyway, they're calling me to flagellation, so I'll have to sign off now.

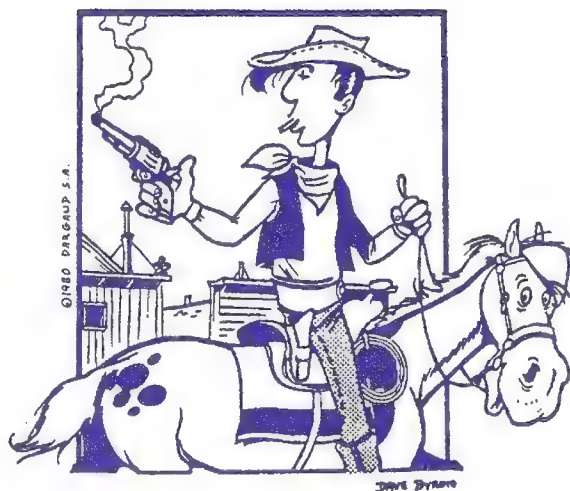
I hope you'll print this letter, since these days I can do with anything complimentary, and anyway I'd like your readers to see that I'm really a hip, fun-loving, erudite, boogie the nite away, brother and not just a dumb old pile of rags who kills people and slops soup down his beard. /(There's only one thing I want to know -- Ayatollah than Graeme Bassett?)/

Brian Bolland Reaction, seen across the span of a number of issues of Bem, is a bit like a very complex piece of music. Occasionally loud and profound themes rise, resonate throughout the whole, and then diminish...perhaps faintly echoing as the rest of the orchestra fragments, each instrument sounding clear among its fellows in strange and changing patterns, until some soloist blasts out with some resounding theme, and back come the rest in one voice. The last major theme in Reaction was the "Are Homosexuals Human" question and its related implications--a theme admirably instigated by soloist Les Chester with his quaint old ideology. I credit Les with the imagination of cooking up that hokum for the sole purpose of getting everybody riled up, and preventing a few of us from dozing off at the back. The current prevailing theme is the "Thrillkill" issue, and before its echoes die away I want to tell you what I thought of it...in an inch or so from now. With Bem 26, Reaction has become a bit staccato (okay, I'll quit these dumb musical metaphors), and everybody's talking very, clearly and very interestingly about a lot of very important things...especially Pete Martin, I thought.

Someone or other, possibly Andy Warhol, once said: "Art is safe." And what it is assumed he meant by that is that art (and by art I mean one form of creative expression or other) exists in a separate pocket of existence from the real world of human experience. The real world may pose challenges, and ask questions, generally push us around, and we are affected by it physically; eg How do I escape from this burning building? How do I live in a society which discriminates against the colour of my skin or my sexual proclivities? But art (and Pete, please bear with the word a while longer), in its back pocket, can ask these questions, it can shock us, and unbalance us, and outrage and disgust us. It can throw us off the window-ledge of our preconceptions without us even getting out of our comfy chair. By frequent contact with this safe alternative reality of extremes and revolutions we acquire the extra dimension of ability to cope with and embrace the strange challenges of the real world. In reality you would restrict someone, for instance, from shooting you dead from the roof of a tall building--but once you start imposing restrictions on "art", you diminish its effect as defined.

Okay, let's assume that comics is a legit form of creative expression, is "art". In order to be this it has to make itself oblivious of its obligations and the moral code which restricts it. In order to realise its full potential, it must reserve the right to be immoral, the right to be good, bad, ugly, beautiful--but, above all, the right to be wrong!

Comics are for kids, who at a tender and impressionable age have to be weaned on a carefully balanced, homogenised, pasteurised and sterilised diet. They receive subliminal training in moral codification in their comics. The good guys are handsome and NEVER kill, while the bad guys hatch plots to rule the universe and stamp out freedom, liberty and the American way, and invariably accidentally die. To be blunt (sic), this is moral and political propaganda. "Thrillkill" (finally I get to it) deviates from this neat mould and would clearly not be suitable for the impressionable kiddies, but what happens? You get intelligent, clear-headed comics fans throwing up their hands in horror at this flagrant deviation from the status quo. Kathleen Glancy, in her rôle as guardian of what is right and proper, is



really worried that Wolverine KILLED! The poor guy must be driven to distraction by his inability to use those claws against the villains instead of carving up the furniture.

My reactions to "Thrillkill" were this: I was very impressed with it. Firstly, because it was Adams at his best; secondly because it was a starkly realistic incident observed in all its ugliness by the artist and told without a hint of moralising, or of the neat tying up of loose ends; and thirdly, subsequent examination reveals it to be a classic example of an artist pursuing his own visual project within the context of a story. If you've seen it you probably know what I'm talking about. Adams has turned the incident into a study in space-time. There are a number of recognisable characters who behave within a framework of a short space of time on a stage consisting of a stretch of sidewalk with roadworks. During the couple of minutes in which the incident takes place each character reacts, and in each frame (panel) is shown to have moved into a position relative to the stage, and to the other characters. One such example is the bespectacled man who begins by picking up the spilled groceries, drops them, again, leaps across the hole in the road, is brought down by a bullet through the shoulder, picks himself up, and finally is sent crashing through a plate glass window. Adams could almost have drawn a ground plan in his studio, complete with tiny model people which he moved as the incident progressed, so exact is his understanding (in purely visual terms) of his subject matter. I won't say it has worked perfectly (there are flaws, such as Mrs Guindon mysteriously rolling over from her left to her right side before anyone has touched her), but on the whole Adams has taken advantage of the opportunity to employ his sharp powers of observation and bring this harrowing occurrence to our attention. Some have said that Adams presents these vividly brutal scenes of death in a gloating way. It's my view that his clarity of vision makes it impossible for him to create images of muffled, blurred, tasteful idealism in which people go to their maker with dignity, meaningfully, and with choirs of angels heralding their approach.

Having said that, Mr Super-Ego may be a bloody good comic artist, but I wish he'd get down from his pedestal and knock out a few decent strips. Do I detect a certain element of derision forming among comic fans? It's currently non-U to be an Adams freak.

In response to Steve Winders' review of the 1980 Dan Dare Annual: IPC is a huge company, and any one publication is merely a statistic. Over the years, statistics have proved that the annuals in their present form are profitable. They sell adequately well, largely to parents (who can't spot a twenty-year-old reprint) as a Christmas treat for little Willy. They

cost very little to produce, because with restrictive budgets they largely contain free reprint material, or work by exploitable new artists. Descending through the strata of bureaucracy to editorial level, you will find people who would dearly like to make the annuals good and the weeklies great, but they are patted on the head and sent back to work.

In closing, a few quick points: I like Bem very much. When it arrives through my letter box, everything stops until it is read. In addition to Reaction being like an orchestra, Bem as a whole is like a good crime novel, full of riddles, clues, intrigues, and mysterious figures who operate under assumed names. The new reader, having ploughed through the head-spinning complexities of Reaction, has to ward off the feeling of alienation at not being in the know about Martin Lock being in reality Ed Sallis; or that Dave Gibbons is a glaringly obvious pseudonym for Dave Harwood; or which one of those tantalizing portraits that accompany the Catholicity column is most like Nige...er, Kathleen Glancy. I like Kath's column. She seems genuinely concerned about the welfare of super-types in their domestic lives. She is a truly kind person. (Kath, do you read The Flash? I was really cut up about Iris Allen's death.)

I expect Mike has been sniping from the rooftop at me in his little brackets throughout this. He may have cut me to shreds, but I hope he has let me die meaningfully, and with dignity, and.../(What, and have Judge Dredd drag me screaming from my bed in the middle of the night for a little...retribution!)/

Margaret O'Connell The shortage of UK female fans must really be acute if Martin is taking desperate measures like sending me Bems 25 & 26 free and unsolicited. Okay, I had written him about The UK Heroines Showcase #2 (Kathleen Glancy has a hilarious article in it), so he didn't just pick my name at random out of a New Jersey phonebook, but I'm obviously getting some kind of special treatment because of my sex.

This makes me distinctly uneasy. It's a feeling similar to the one I get from certain over-chivalrous men who practically knock you over rushing to open doors for you -- you wonder if they're really listening to anything you say, or if they are paying attention to anything at all about you beyond the fact that you are female. My uneasiness was definitely not dispelled by Mike Cruden's remarks (in response to Cat Yronwode's letter) about the "usefulness" of a ballot asking "(1) Are you female, (2) What's your phone number." Fandom may be a lonely hearts' club, as a friend of mine claims, but that aspect of it is definitely not what attracted me.

On a related subject, in regard to Mike's asking Stephen McGonagle whether he really thinks that "seeing a drawing of a naked lady...or reading a dirty joke will be damaging to a younger reader": I do think so, under certain circumstances, though probably not for the same reasons Stephen would cite. To give one specific example out of several possible ones, I found the "something in between" Thundermole cartoon on page 2 of Bem-25 damaging to me directly as an (adult) female, since by implication it reduced all women to nothing more than that "something in between." It was also indirectly damaging to everyone else, especially to younger readers, since it tended to reinforce a view of woman as sex object with no business doing anything but being attractive

--concluded on page 32...

Bemuscene

X-MEN #130 (February)

"Dazzler" by Chris Claremont, John Byrne & Terry Austin

Oh, that's Dazzler, huh? Wow, I'm underwhelmed. Now about the rest of the book...

The trouble with this book (apart from the apparent prejudices that Claremont & Byrne have explained time and time again that they don't suffer from, so I guess I must be imagining them) is that it has 2 scripters, and no plotter.

What it needs (said he, with the calm assurance of someone with no experience in the field) is someone to get hold of C & B by the scruffs of their necks and say: "Hey! You've forgotten this!" "Hoy! What happened between this page here and that page there?" "Oh c'mon! You wouldn't use that old cliché, would you?" "Er, don't you think that ended a trifle suddenly after all that build-up?" "Just a mo! This doesn't fit with previously established characterisation..." Etc, etc.

Don't get me wrong, guys-- I like the book, honest! And if it's any consolation, I like the overall direction the book's taking (if only the stories didn't keep getting in the way). I just wish they'd take a little more time and care, that's all.

-K. Williams

DR WHO WEEKLY -- THE FIRST TEN ISSUES

Marvel UK's new Dr Who Weekly is now in its third month. Edited by Dez Skinn, it contains only 13-16 pages of strips (compared to 2000 A.D.'s 24), but runs about 7 pages of informative articles about the Doctor, his friends and adversaries. The strips are a 5-page Dr Who serial by the 2000 A.D. team of Mills/Wagner & Gibbons, a 5-page "War of the Worlds" adaptation by Chris Claremont that is imported from America, and another 4-page strip about characters connected with Dr Who, written by Steve Moore and drawn by Paul Neary and others. So far in this series the Daleks have featured in a rather run-of-the-mill story reminiscent of the Dalek annuals of the mid-sixties, the Cybermen in a better story about a cyberman who has inherited human feelings, and a Sontaran in a poor 1-parter which was well below the standard of most of Tharg's Future Shocks. The latest in the series is an interesting 3-parter about an alien stealing a Tardis from the Time Lords.

Mills & Wagner have given Dr Who the "2000 A.D." treatment in their strip. His first adventure, about a parallel Roman Empire which never fell, features a little robot, "Vesuvius", who speaks in archaic fashion and whose small stature & timidity immediately call to mind Walter (from Judge Dredd) and the Gronk (from Strontium Dog). Also appearing are the evil Malevilus creatures, whose favourite pastime is eating members of the public, a popular theme among 2000 A.D.'s monsters. The story is straightforward. Dr Who finds that the Empire is being controlled by the nasty Malevilus, using a robot legion to enforce order, and he decides something must be done about it. Too conveniently, Vesuvius shows him a chamber in the catacombs containing a whole army of genetically engineered beast-men that had been de-activated centuries before. Of course, the Doctor uses these to destroy the evil robot legion. He then proceeds to tackle the Malevilus in the Imperial Box of the Circus Maximus. As their leader changes his appearance to his real, hideous form in order to eat the Doctor, the Doctor quickly turns a TV camera round (Grandstand are covering the chariot racing), showing all of Rome who is controlling them. All

the people rebel, and the Malevilus are beaten. End of story.

Judging by the first adventure, the Dr Who strip is competent and readable, but lacking that rigour and originality that have made Judge Dredd and some of the other 2000 A.D. strips so popular. It is obvious that in this first story the strip has tried to stick rigidly to what its writers think is a successful formula-- whereas Dredd is still reaching out and taking a chance with new ideas. If a similar story by the same team appeared in 2000 A.D., there would certainly be witty asides, such as a David Coleman look-alike commentating on the chariot race, and graffiti on the catacomb wall; this sort of thing, so characteristic of John Wagner/Howard's work in Judge Dredd, has been left out. This is because most of the asides would not be appreciated in America. So, like several other British products that have been tailored for America, Mills and Wagner seem to have allowed the considerations of the American market to stifle their irreverent wit, and caused them to "play safe" in this first story. If America sees Mills and Wagner at their sharp-edged best, then it might take to them, but if they continue to "pull their punches", then the X-Men can rest easy. It is perhaps ironic that the hero of the strip comes from a TV programme that has never pandered to American taste, and is now about to enter its seventeenth year, as well as gaining an ever-increasing following in America.

The articles include focuses on actors and actresses who have played regular characters in Dr Who, telling about their other acting experience, and featuring comments on the series by them. There is also a series on the Monsters of Dr Who, which is quite informative, often supplying more information about the creatures than could be gleaned from their TV appearances. In issue 8 the monster series took a break, to be replaced by an excellent 5-page article by Richard Holliss on the two Dr Who feature films. This gave a frank appraisal of the films, as well as supplying a lot of information about their making, with comments from Milton Subotsky, who scripted them.

Another regular series is a 2 or 3-page summary of each of Dr Who's TV adventures, complete with photographs. For this, Marvel went right back to episode 1 in 1963, and at present are retelling the William Hartnell adventures in their original order. This series is one of the most enjoyable features in the comic, and it is to Marvel Britain's credit that they have not ignored the previous incarnations of the Doctor, but recognise their importance to the character and insist that the reader does the same. It was right that the first issue was dedicated to William Hartnell, the first doctor-- the man who created the rôle.

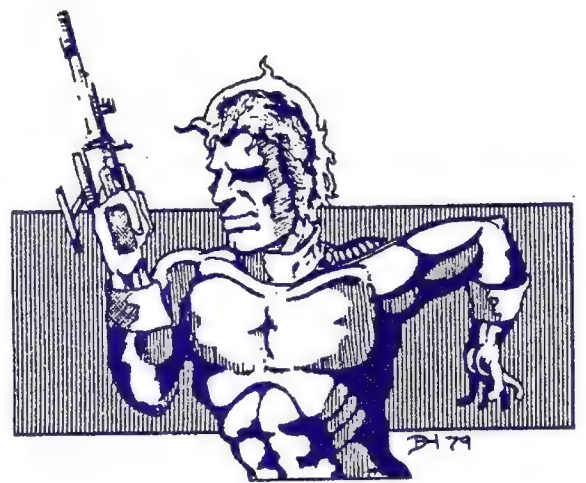
-Steve Winders

STAR WARS ANNUAL #1 (1979)

"The Long Hunt" by Chris Claremont, Mike Vosburg & Steve Leialoha.

Strange that this should be the fiftieth comic that I've reviewed for Bem, since this is the first Star Wars comic I've ever read; I've collected the series, of course, but never bothered to peruse them. As to the film, since all the advertising hype told me to go see it, you must go see it, you're a bloody cretin if you don't see it, as I detest being ordered to do something, and am something of a nonconformist, I didn't go to see it...

Still, I enjoyed this particular comic, with its simple story and gentle art. It was a pleasant time-waster, nowhere near a classic--but not many comics are, these days, and less are designed to be. This



simply entertains.

We learn a little of Han Solo's smuggling past, and Luke's father, plus the omnipresent Darth Vader is also involved indirectly, as an old foe of Han's tracks Solo and his comrades down in this tale of interplanetary revenge. The ending seems rushed and rather clichéd, but only slightly mars the overall flavour of the competent script.

Plus, as an added bonus, a gallery of eleven Star Wars Weekly covers... I bet you're glad I told you that, aren't you? / (You're all heart, Nige! -ML) / -NPE

TIME WARP #3 (March)

"Time Warp" by Mike W. Barr, Ed Barretto & Dan Adkins; "The Stranger From The Edge of Tomorrow" by J.M. DeMatteis & J. Grandenetti; "Rites of Spring" by Denny O'Neil & Dick Giordano; "In Love's Name" by DeMatteis & Tom Sutton; "The Dimensions of Greed" by DeMatteis & Steve Ditko; "Out of Their Heads" by Arnold Drake & Madz Castrillo; "On The Day of His Return" by Dan Mishkin, Gary Cohn, & Ditko; and "Plague" by George Kashdan, Don Newton & Steve Mitchell.

This is DC's excellent nostalgic 50's style SF book. Is it good? No, not really. Bloody marvellous is more like it!

The artists involved have all turned in better than usual work. Tom Sutton as inked by himself is of course excellent, and as monster-ish tales seem to be his forte he really excels himself here. Newton is great anyhow, but Steve Mitchell's inking makes his work even better.

And the stories? Pure entertainment, and a joy to read. Most of all, FUN, despite the fact that a lot of the stories are downbeat, or have downbeat endings. Maybe that says something about my sense of humour. (What sort of view do you expect from a Torquay hotel? The hanging gardens of Babylon? Hordes of wildebeest sweeping majestically across the horizon? Krakatoa exploding?)

I would feel very depressed and unhappy if TIME WARP was to fail. There isn't another comic like it on the market. So, come on fandom, try the book please, and keep a quality comic alive.

-Ken Moore

SHE-HULK #2 (March)

"Deathrace!" by David Anthony Kraft, Mike Vosburg, & Chic Stone.

Now, Spider-Woman I liked, as it took care not to copy the original wall-crawler --but Jennifer Walters, alias "The Savage She-Hulk", I find in no way appealing.

The whole Hulk concept has been twisted, turning what was the embodiment of masculine frustration and rage, into a woman, clad in insultingly ripped blouse; big, green, and still stereotypically "well-stacked" and "pretty". At least she keeps control of her darker/greener side (thus far -- but "cousin" Brucie used to, too), but Marvel are exploiting not just their own Hulk concept, but women too.

Welcome back, DAK; I hope you get a few better assignments, with better artists, soon.

-C.N. Padgett

1984 #10 (December)

"The Whatever Shop" by Jim Stenstrum & Alex Nino; "Herma" by Bill DuBay & José Gonzalez; "The Little Spaceship That Could" by John Ellis Sech & José Ortiz; "The Klanks Are Coming! The Klanks Are Coming!" by Rich Margopoulos & Vic Catan; "The Starfire Saga", drawn by Rudy Nebres; "Ghita of Alizarr" by Frank Thorne; "Haxtur" by Victor De La Fuente; and "Thinking of You" by Nicola Cuti & Abel Laxamana.

With this magazine, you have to take the rough with the smooth. The art is always at least pretty, and with Nino and Thorne around often a lot more, but the stories vary wildly. Bill DuBay parades his adolescent fantasies yet again with "Herma", which indulges in this (thankfully final) episode in sado-masochism and bondage; and "Whatever Shop" is a pure delight, a tricky pure SF tale. Frank Thorne's tale of his new warrior maid also has its share of nudity, but somehow, for me, Frank's approach stops it from being in any way sexist. Ghita is a true hero, and a whole woman; I'm not sure I'd care to meet her, but I can cheer her on from here!

"Little Spaceship" is written by a man with a nasty, twisted mind, and is wholly brilliant; and since "The Starfire Saga" is only in its second instalment, I will (charitably) reserve judgement. The other stories are okay, and using typeset text is a big plus point; someday, all black & white magazines should be like this.

Yes, this is a magazine I always look forward to now -- and you? -C.N. Padgett

JOHN'S NEW YORK ADVENTURE

It was 1979 before I achieved one of my life's ambitions and visited New York. A lot of the trip has to be left out--after all, this is a family magazine...

One part of my itinerary was a visit to both the Marvel and DC offices, so, armed with introductory letters for Jim Shooter and Paul Levitz, I visited Marvel first.

Marvel is on the sixth floor of the Cadence Building, quite near beautiful St Patrick's Cathedral. When I arrived, Jim Shooter wasn't available, so Jim Salicrup, Marvel's latest editorial genius, guided me round for the "Five Minute Tour", which in fact lasted two hours. Jim edits, among other magazines, CAPTAIN AMERICA, MASTER OF KUNG FU, and X-MEN; he was also responsible for the "Alice Cooper" comic, which was number 12 in the sales list for its month. Next on the list may be a "Blondie" comic; it seems Debbie Harry and Co have a new manager (Alice Cooper's), and the group is near to achieving Kiss-Beatles-Rolling Stones level fame. Blondie's a popular figure around the Bullpen, as is Linda Ronstat.

Both Jim and his associate editor (for lettercols etc) Bob Budiansky, who worked in the "British" Bullpen a while ago, were very helpful. Next on the list was neo-Marvel editor Denny O'Neil, who is taking over a lot of Marv Wolfman's work, including SPIDER-MAN and FANTASTIC FOUR. Denny is one of my favourite comic writers --but then, at the side of some of the newer comic pros like Roger Stern, he seems almost laconic.

Archie Goodwin, editor of EPIC, was the next person I met--the Bullpen seem very pleased with the results of this experiment. Ralph Macchio works in the magazine department, and I was also introduced to John Romita, both junior and senior, Irene Vartanoff, Roger Stern, Norah Mazlin (I came up in the lift with her), and George Roussos.

John Byrne and Carmine Infantino work so fast it is difficult to keep both in work. When I met Jim Shooter, he was

trying to get as much drawing paper to John in Canada as possible. Jim Salicrup showed me an Infantino fill-in for CAPTAIN AMERICA, possibly to be inked by Tom Sutton. Cap's helmet had "Flash" wings, and the shield was wrong--but these would be ironed out in the art corrections room.

I saw comic covers being coloured in a room that resembled a photographic dark room; unlike DC, Marvel do this colouring "in-house", rather than using freelancers.

Terry Austin dropped by, and I found him to be a very pleasant and friendly man. We talked about his work with Steve Englehart; he told me how annoyed he was that the English digest reprint comics had hacked about the DETECTIVE COMICS series. Bob Budiansky also let me sit in on a letter column. You would be surprised at the efforts and emphasis placed on correct grammar and style in the letter columns.

I just missed Dez Skinn; he was supposed to be in New York the same time I was, but he was dropping in the following week. On the whole, the Marvel Bullpen gave off a casual and friendly air of efficiency, and thanks to Jim and Bob for making me so welcome.

In contrast, the DC offices, on the 6th floor (co-incidentally) of the Warner Communications Building, seemed very, very professional, and much quieter. After passing through Rockefeller Plaza, scene of many comic strips, I met Paul Levitz, who certainly seems dedicated to comics, and also Julie Schwartz, who was plotting the latest ACTION with Cary Bates. "Hey, don't I know you", he said--it's a standard Schwartz quote, I gather. Other alumni I met were E. Nelson Bridwell and Gaspar Saladino (who lettered many of the early Justice League issues).

Paul showed me the impressive "Legend of The Batman" artwork that John Byrne had completed--his first work for DC. The style is a little like Giordano, and the series will show unexplored scenes and facets of the Batman's past.

Visiting Jack C. Harris, chatting with Len Wein at the time, I saw Brian Bolland's impressive cover for GREEN LANTERN. It is possible Brian may be doing a story for TIME WARP soon.

Len told me that Green Arrow will be written out of the JLA (hopefully without him quitting); Firestorm will join as his replacement. Next year's JLA/JSA team-up will feature both the New Gods and the Forever People; it may last 3 issues.

Paul explained how popular merchandising and foreign editions were, especially in the wake of the Superman movie (ironically the in-flight film on the plane over). DC are waiting to hear from IPC about a possible weekly British comic; IPC would be licensing all DC's material.

The DC bullpen was more formal, then, although I caught them on an "Orlando and Kubert-less Day", with fewer freelancers dropping in. Marvel seemed to be a far larger, more casual operation.

-John Lindley



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IZNOGOD AND THE DAY OF MISRULE
£1.15 for 48 pages; soft covers

Another amiable comics album, with four adventures of Caliph Haroun al Plassid, written & drawn by Goscinny & Tabary and translated from the French by Anthea Bell & Derek Hockridge. The title tale stars the wicked ("Oh, how I want to be Caliph instead of the Caliph") vizier Iznogoud, whose latest scheme to take over Baghdad revolves around the one day in the year when masters and servants change places, filling 20 fun pages. There are also three 8-page tales which I found very amusing. The red indian Ompa-Pa is an acquired taste, but if you like Asterix, Goscinny's version of the Arabian Nights will prove to have a thousand delights for you. You might say -- it's magic! -Ruan Lanihorne

NIGE EDWARDS #1 (March 1955)

"Among Us Walks...The Reviewer" by his Mother and Father, plus a doctor

The above person has been reviewing us for over five years now, so it's time we comics had our turn to review him!

The cover, unsigned but probably by Mike Sekowsky and Mike Esposito's aunt, is a bit shop-soiled; there's some yellowing and cracking at the edges, but the spine is still unmarked, the staples unrusted. The interior doesn't seem to be all there --but what there is works well enough. Brought up on comics (his family couldn't afford nappies), he does have what could be termed a good working knowledge of the comics medium.

Edwoods seems to enjoy reviewing comics (among other things); he tries to be fair and remains unbiased by current trends & fads, which he manages by keeping his eyes closed while reading the paper ('cept of course page 3). He has what appears to be a genuine affection for comics, placing them somewhat above his other two main interests--alcohol and buxom young women.

Sometimes he wavers and goes over the top with his writtings (and his spelling sense was never 100%), other times he hacks his work out without the benefit of inspiration--but all the while his heart seems to be in the right place.

In conclusion, I think we comics can put up with Edwoods reviewing us, as long as you readers can put up with reading his reviews. -Nigel P. Edwards (with one or two miniscule additions by Superswipe!)

SUPERMAN FAMILY #200 (April)

Lois Lane in "Unhappy Anniversary", drawn by Bob Oksner & Joe Giella; Jimmy Olsen in "The Thief at Sky's Edge", by Alex Saviuk & David Hunt; "Clark Kent's Frantic Fan" by Kurt Schaffenberger & Vince Colletta; Superwoman in "Something Swims the Time Stream" by Win Mortimer & Colletta; and Mr & Mrs Superman in "Celebration" by Oksner & Giella--all 51 pages written by Gerry Conway.

Call me a sentimental old softie if you will, but I liked this--it gave me a nice warm glow.

So what if Gerry Conway's vision of the future is a touch rose-tinted? What's wrong with a little optimism for a change? At least the developments he outlined were all logical, in their own way.

And so what if things tended to tie up rather too neatly all around--this being a one-off (well, theoretically; but I wouldn't rule out sequels...) rather than a series, it had to be done that way, really. It wasn't too implausible.

I liked the liberated and liberal ambience. I liked the aura of friendliness and willingness to understand. Would that it might be so...

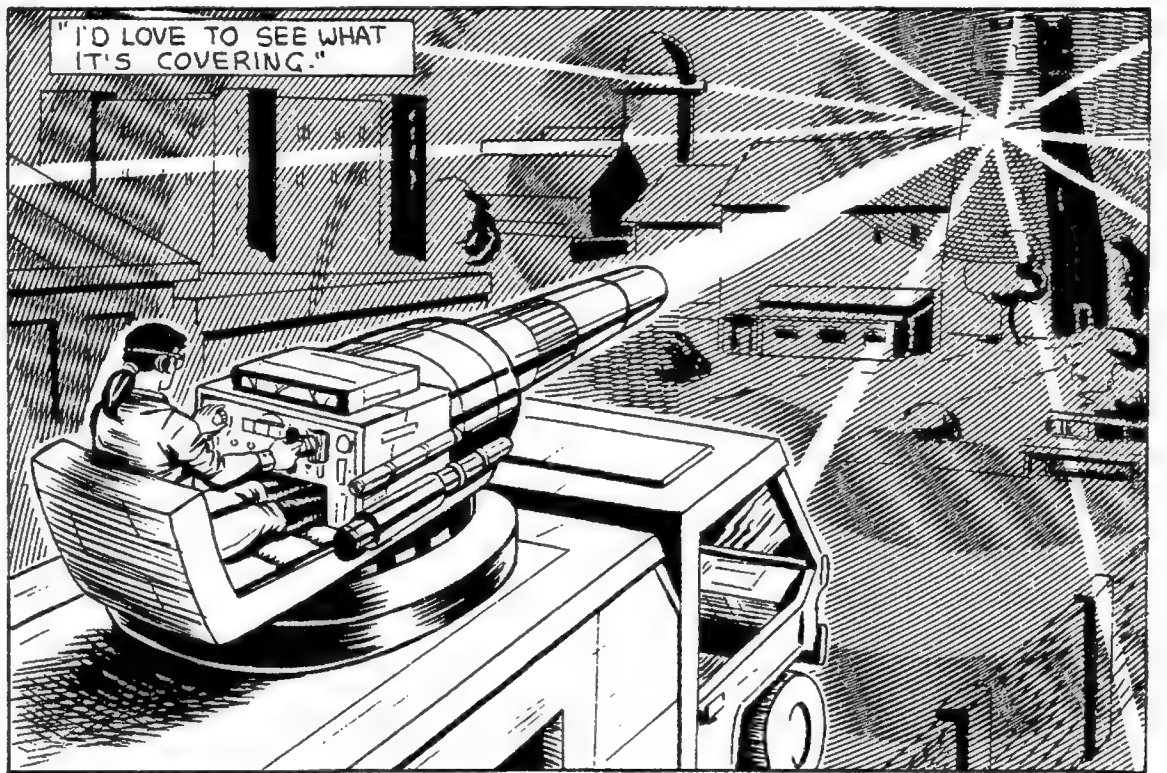
I liked this mag a lot. Guess I am just an old softie at heart... -K. Williams



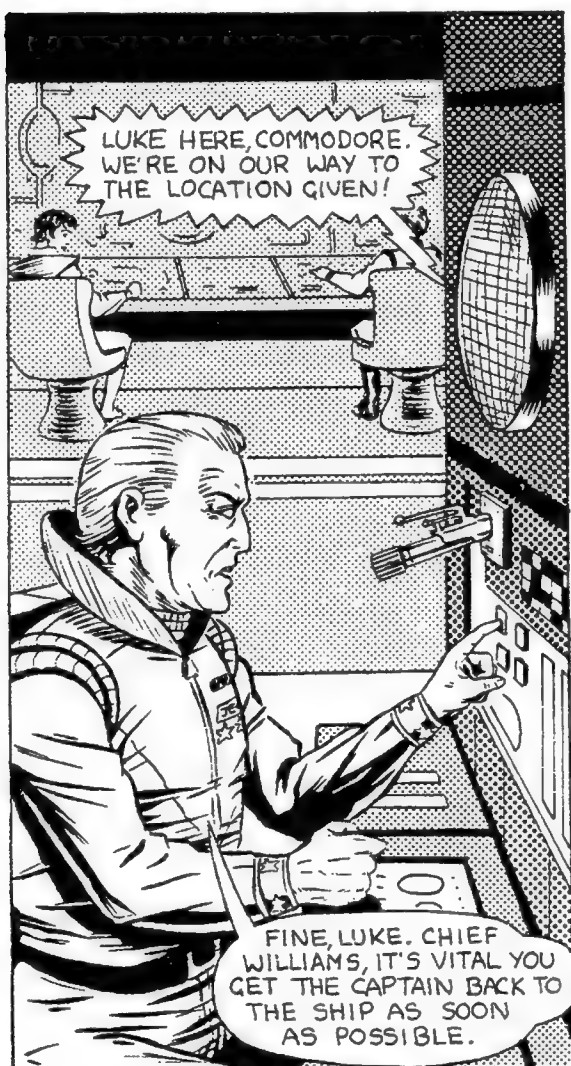
CHAPTER THREE: *THE CONTACT MAN*

WORDS:
MARTIN LOCK
PICTURES:
Drew Harwood 79









Fan Things

Since it's about the only major fanzine not to be covered in my last three columns (Bem-26, Fantasy Trader 43, and FT 44), it must be CEREBRO's turn to lead off; #7 has come through just in time (40p in shops, or £3 for 6 issues by post, which includes a year's membership of The Official X-Men Fan Club, from G.F. Willmetts,

30 A4 pages, plus a six-page A4 supplement devoted to a bibliography and analysis of Colossus), and is certainly an excellent read. Editor Geoff Lamprey is developing the talents of his Club members (over 100 now!) with great flair, and, assuming you enjoy a certain comic put together by an inspired trio called Claremont, Byrne & Austin, you'll find this a long and enjoyable read. Besides various con reports, features, and 6 pages of letters, there's the 7-page first part of an interview with Chris Claremont...

Not many fanzines seem to be managing to get consecutive issues mentioned in consecutive Bems, these days, which goes to show that Bem's appearing more regularly than most zines; however, out now is MAGAZINE OF TOMORROW #5 33p by post for 20 A5 pages from Graham Bleathman,

chock full of The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy, Blake's 7, Moonbase 3, modelmaking, Gerry Anderson's creations, a 6-page instalment of the fine "Second British Empire" strip by Glenn Dakin and Graham Bleathman, and a back cover inked by Graham over pencils by Ron Tiner. It's a good fanzine, a sort of fannish equivalent to STARBURST; recommended.

Fresh in from Canada is HIDDEN PLANET NEBULA #1 28 7" x 9 1/2" pages for 75 cents from K.C. Comics Group,

it's a stripzine, with well-executed, dynamic action art by editor Kenny Moran. However, there is a slight shortage of story—the main strip is just one 16-page hectic fight scene featuring Ken, permanently surprised, and Patsy, who never finds time to put any clothes on. As an artist, Kenny knows his stuff; but, on this showing, he could do with a writer and an editor.

No such carping applies to WORKIN' KLASZ SUPERHERO #2 (40p for 44 A4 pages from Jolly Martian Productions, 13, Worcester Road, Guildford, Surrey); well, it was a little late, and their ad last Bem did mis-quote my review in Bem-24 rather, but again we have remarkable value from a set of very talented people. All the strips are excellent, from such worthies as Steve Brown, Rob Davis, Glenn Fabry, Mark Casto, and John Mould—and the small amount of text is fun too. The appearance of this zine is a very welcome boost for fandom; everyone should buy a copy (or two...).

WKS# is all the more precious when one reads in ARGENT VOID PRESS #4 35p for 36 A5 pages from John Foster,

that ELIPSE is dead—all the material, Phil Elliott says, was assembled for #4, but the best print cost estimate they could get was more than twice what #3 cost... Phil, and co-editor Ian Wiczorek, just couldn't afford it. A great shame. But AVP itself is what I'd call "a good read"; not quite as good as

the previous issue—but enjoyable. A full 12 pages are devoted to 2 rather similar reports on Comicon '79, with nine blurred, dark photos; the rest is features. I've got two main comments that I hope John will take as constructive; firstly please improve the typing, both for the actual spelling and the odd missing word, and secondly, while I understand that any fanzine is put together by an "in-group", too much emphasis on John & Mark & the other John, and what they drink, and how often, can be rather off-putting for those wonderful casual fan readers that every zine needs to attract if it is to survive. Don't get me wrong—AVP #4 is well worth buying and enjoying, but it has potential to be even better.

MEDIA #17 30p for 20 A4 pages from Nige Balloch,

is out at last—strangely, after such a long wait, it seems a rushed and rather insubstantial effort. Graeme Bassett presents his "Mr B" opinions with as much panache as ever. Robert Salisbury does an interesting comparison of the 2 cons last summer, and Nige Edwards is never less than entertaining... but the print is very messy, destroying one strip and making some of the small print a chore to decipher, and all in all not a lot is happening in the 20 pages here.

FANDCM #10 24 A5 pages for an s.a.e. from Eddie Walsh,

is as usual a useful combination of fanzine and dealer sales list, full of cover repros, interesting bits of news, and a wide variety of goodies for sale. It's no sit-down "good read" like AVP or Cerebro, but at the price, it's nice.

And handed out at the January Comic Mart in London (next one at the Central Hall, Westminster is April 19th—see you there?) for the nominal sum of 10p was SPEAKEASY #5 20p by post for 10 A4 pages, from Richard Ashford,

since he only printed it the night before, plenty of up-to-date news, and other topical material, was to be found—but it's a bit late to buy a copy now! I'll just suggest that, if you are approached by a SPEAKEASY-seller at the next mart, you take the easy way out and buy a copy.

VERTIGO #8 20p by post for 32 A5 pages from Geoff Lindsey (Vertigo),

has a spiffy "Alien meets Star Trek quite near a Black Hole" cover by award-winning fan artist Dave Hornsby, and includes reviews of the recent spate of SF films; but it's

the regular features that took my interest more. Vertigo has appeared with impressive regularity over the last year or so, and gained a reputation for sensible opinions and enjoyable articles; if I say that this issue is up to standard, that should be quite enough to get quite a few of you writing off for copies!

THE OWLS EFFORT #3 20p for 32 A6 pages from Dick Domar,

has 15 pages of letters, and thus quite justifiably calls itself a letterzine; another nine pages are filled with Dick's comics for sale, and the rest are short features and other oddments, such as some really funny "Classified Advertisements". But fans of Reaction are especially advised to investigate; Dick

gets some interesting mail!

As indeed do I. The DAILY STRIPS mastermind, John Dakin,

reports that in the near future he'll be starting a newspaper strip society, the main aim of which will be the reprinting of complete strip adventures. £3 will be the probable initial subscription, to cover the first 3 or 4 reprints (depending on printing costs), one of which will be a "Garth". He has also been promised a "Modesty Blaise" adventure, which can only be supplied to members. If you think the idea sounds interesting, send John an s.a.e. I gather that the idea is that an official Society could be allowed to reprint strips that one enterprising fan on his own might not be allowed to; so it seems a good idea to me.

There aren't many fanzines that appear regularly every month—but here's K-ZINE #17 10 A4 pages from K. Williams,

with a couple of pages of letters, three pages of letters by Nige Edwards from May 1976 (those were the days...), a new column by Nige, and plenty of editorial presence. There's a fanzine review column too, commenting on NAME TAB #9, OMEGA #11, OR ELSE #2, FEMME FATALE #10/11, NUMBER #11, EM #11, ANONYMOUS #7, and others... which may not mean anything to you, as they aren't generally available. These are "apazines", sent in by members of the apa (amateur press association, yet!) to the central mailer, who sorts them into sets and mails them out. If you are interested in putting together 4 or more A4 pages of your own fanzine every 3 months, photocopying 20 or so copies, and exchanging 20 copies of one zine for one copy each of about 20 zines, the place to send the customary s.a.e. to is Phil Greenaway.

Or if you just want the monthly K-ZINE, you will have to come to some financial arrangement with K. Williams to cover the cost of doing an extra photocopy, plus postage!

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Now I certainly hope that FANTASY TRADER #44 is being distributed with this issue of Bem to British subscribers, and is on sale fairly close to this Bem in a number of good comics shops--so, how many of the fanzines I review in "Fanhunter" there should I also comment on here? I think a series of capsule reviews is called for. THE ALTERNATIVE HEADMASTER'S BULLETIN #1 24 A4-plus pages for 45p from Gerald Midgley,

is an interesting mix of fanzine and local "minority arts" magazine. AFTER IMAGE #3 14 A4 pages for 28p from Lew Stringer,

Warks CV10 7BS) is a nice mixture, with strips and features. MASTERS OF INFINITY #2 30p for 16 A4 pages from Mike Taylor,

has a Brian Bolland interview, lots of potential, and my recommendation. CLOSER TO THE EDGE #5 6 A4 pages for two 10p stamps from Steven J. Green,

is a letterzine touching on both SF and comics fandom. OGRE #4 20 A5 pages for 15p from Colin Gould,

or free with GRAPHIC SENSE) has some beautiful art and some interesting features...

GRAPHIC SENSE #6 44 8" by 10.3" pages for 50p by post from Gez Kelly,

I also reviewed in that FT column; however, since GS is so important to fandom in Britain, I feel I'd better ramble on about it for a few lines. It has a fine 4-colour cover of Barbarella by Dave Byrom, and the dozen main contributors are almost all names well-known to fandom; in FT I call it "a magazine that we, fandom, can be proud of" ...and yet, as a fanzine it tends to lack editorial distinctiveness. This is a trap that the larger fanzines can fall into, one that Bem isn't immune to; once a zine is widely distributed, and good work by many different people is available, the temptation for the editor is for him to retire into the background, just pasting different contributions onto the pages, and totally invisible to the reader. The news in GS is presented straight, without comment; the Eagle Awards fill two pages, but without comment; only one of eight letters provokes any editorial reaction, which may be from Gez or, from the context, equally well Howard Stangroom. The editorial is a tiny part of page three--like Dez Skinn's pieces on a "Rampage" contents page, but rather less fannish & informal.

Gez can be proud of what he has achieved with GRAPHIC SENSE, FANTASY TRADER, and THE SUCCESSORS; GS is an excellent zine, and I hope it maintains its quarterly schedule for many years. But why does Gez make this big effort? Has he visions of national distribution? (Why do any of us involve ourselves, come to that--but I don't have any magic answers!) I would dearly like to see a lengthy editorial in

KEY TO THE CENTRESPREAD (left to right)

Ro-Jaws by Kev O'Neill; Nightcrawler by John Byrne; Hulk by Denys Savage; ? by Hunt Emerson; Dan Dare by Dave Gibbons; Michael Mauser by Joe Staton; Pro Rata by Dave Simons; Pip the Troll by Jim Starlin; Howard the Duck by Steve Leialoha; The Mekon by Dave Gibbons; Iron Man by Jerry Bingham; Gamora by Steve Leialoha; Warlock by Jim Starlin; Spider-Man by Rich Buckler; Judge Dredd by Brian Bolland; Iron Fist by Rudy D. Nebres; Father Shandor by John Bolton; Grandma by Ken Simpson; and The Batman by Frank Brunner. All characters are copyright (c) 1980 by their respective publishers: I.P.C. Magazines Ltd, the Marvel Comics Group, Charlton Publishing Co, and D.C. Comics Inc.

GS, in which Gez outlines his policies, his ideals, and his hopes and fears. The situation where one of comics fandom's best and biggest magazines is operated by a publisher rather than an editor is not one that ought to go on for long.

FANTASY UNLIMITED--THE SHOP is now open at 21, Canonbury Lane, Islington, London N1; presided over by Alan Austin and with a goodly selection of comics old and new, it's well worth adding to your list of shops to visit in London. It's 5 minutes walk from Highbury & Islington station on the Victoria Line--turn right out of the station into Upper Street, and proceed in a leisurely manner to a crossroads with traffic lights. The Hope & Anchor is on one corner--Alan's shop is a couple of shops along from diagonally opposite.

AMON SPEN II

"Certainly, worth waiting for... rated it highly..." **LES CHESTER (CMNI)**

"Enjoyable, well produced." **MARTIN LOCK (BEM)**

"Intelligent and involving treatment, congratulations all round." **MIKE TAYLOR (Masters Of Infinity)**



SF STRIPS, FEATURES & HUMOUR: A4 LITHO SENT FLAT WITH CARD BACKING, 40p POST FREE from: GARY MILLIDGE

FZ #3 (12 A4 pages from Steve Jones, 85 Kennard Road, Kingswood, Bristol BS15 2AE) includes contributions by Geoff Lamprey, Martin Brimicombe, and the editor (Steve, that is). Steve's enjoying putting his own feature zine together; if you send him 20p, you may well enjoy reading it.

SARJAINFO #25 (40 A4 pages for 18 Finnish marks from Timo Reenpää, Finnish Comics Society, Box 927, 00101 Helsinki 10, Finland) has a long bibliography of the comic work of Carl Barks in English, plus some unpublished and rare work--certainly of interest for any Uncle Scrooge fan! The rest of the magazine is in Finnish, which is only natural; nice layouts, though.

And lastly, PRINCESSIONS #9 is fresh in from America (20 5½" x 8½" pages for 50 cents sea mail, or about \$1.50 air mail, from Adrienne Foster, P.O. Box 6783, San José, CA 95150, USA), although its news is 18 months old due to financial problems and an extended working visit to Merrie Englands. A nice magazine for Wonder Woman and heroine fans, though. -ED SALLIS

REACTION...continued from page 24...

to men that appears to be all too prevalent among your male readers to begin with, judging by some of their more unenlightened letters. This view of women is unnecessarily limiting not just to women themselves, but to the men whose idea of the opposite sex is shaped by such a narrow-minded attitude. For instance, if Roger Lyon didn't have such artificially constricted ideas about the nature and proper behaviour of women, he wouldn't have to go around making a fool of himself pointlessly trying to cast aspersions on Kathleen by expressing doubts about her "femininity" (basically a meaningless conceit).

By the way, I think it was most irresponsible of Maureen James to encourage Roger's silly attitude by taking his remarks as a compliment to her and implying that she agrees with him about Kathleen. "Roger Lyon is a very brave man" my foot! Maureen may not be a feminist herself, but common courtesy, if nothing else, ought to restrain her from being catty about people who are. If she disagrees with Kathleen and wants to criticize her opinions or her means of expressing them, Maureen has a perfect right to do so. But insinuating that someone you don't agree with is in some way defective in character or personality, which is what Roger obviously means by his remark, or implying that you agree with such insinuations when they are made by someone else, is not the proper way to conduct any kind of rational discourse.

I seem to have wandered rather far afield. At any rate, dirty jokes with sexist punchlines and drawings of naked ladies (but no naked gentlemen) are a lot more offensive to my delicate sensibilities than the bovine excrement that Phil Greenaway was so worried about in Bem-25's Reaction.

Despite all this, I did rather like the zine on the whole (why else would I be sending you \$10?), especially Reaction, which is a lot livelier and less pretentious than any American fanzine lettercol I've seen. (I've gone on record as expressing distaste at humour directed at blacks or homosexuals, so I suppose it would seem hypocritical of me not to defend your case for the elimination of the dirty joke. Yet I wonder whether this prickly sensitivity is unduly induced by some universal female inferiority complex. When I hear jokes about men who go to the doctors because they can't crap, or because they feel inadequately endowed, I don't immediately presume that those jokes reduce all males to nothing more than constipated, small-penisned inadequates. I think the case for women to be exempted as humorous targets is different from that of blacks or homosexuals, because many people have little, if any, experience of the latter two, so their ideas about them could very well be unduly, or entirely, influenced by the false images cast by the media. However, most of us meet women on a day-to-day face-to-face basis, and form our opinions from those encounters. Having had a female teacher, often quite fearsome, now could anybody regard women simply as sex-objects. I was impressed by Kath's decision not to reply to Roger Lyon's remark, choosing instead to let her letters speak for her.)/

ART CREDITS:

Dave Byrom: 24; Mark Casto: 16 (strip); Dave Gibbons: 1; Dave Hornsby: 25; Angus McKie: 15; Terry M. Moore: 14; Russ Nicholson: 20, 21; Luke Rainford: 16 (right); Pete Scott: 2; Superswipe: 35; Kev F. Sutherland: 6, 7, 9, 11; Bob Watkins: 26; Geoffrey Whittaker: 23.

Mal Burns'

UNAMERICAN ACTIVITIES AND SUBTERRANEAN HAPPENINGS



In the letters column of Bem-26, artist Bob Watkins expressed doubts that this section of the magazine would last, due to lack of material. At this time, he could not be more wrong. Despite the sorry state of the alternative comix establishment, my own projects included, new items continue to emerge. It would seem that the spirit still flourishes, even now.

Whilst working on the notes for this column, I came across many more titles than I had remembered. Last issue's book report probably accounts for this in part. Those items featured below are the most current -- the others will have to wait until the update for my COMIX INDEX is published. Oh yes -- and when that will be I'm not too certain. It needs a home as an 8 or 12-page pullout in a journal such as this. If you like the idea -- let the editor know.

Britain now has a new monthly comic. It is called **TORRID**, and is published by Gold Star -- one of the sexploitation companies. They also publish **SWISH**, where bondage work by Garry Leach can be found. The new magazine features European reprints on all of its 48 pages, plus an 8-page colour section and pretty tasty covers. It costs £1.25 and is printed on good smelly white paper. On sale at selected newsagents.

TORRID has already reached issue 3, and seems to have provoked retaliation from another publisher, who remains uncredited in **DESIRE** #1. This is a 64-page monster, with American reprint material on newspaper, with an extraordinarily boring black, white & red cover. The inside art is better, however, and the magazine sells at only 95p. It's probably available at similar outlets to the above.

My personal favourite this time around must be **WORKIN' KLAS** SUPERHERO #2 -- it maintains the standard of the first issue with consistently reasonable fan-art and the exceptional tributes to Moebius by Glenn Fabry. A special guest artist spot features another up-and-coming star, Mark Casto -- for more details, see Fan-Things.

Some months back I was handed a circular hailing the arrival of **VISUAL FICTION**. Ever curious, I tackled the artists about the matter. The title has now been changed to **WORLDS APART**, and the group -- Floyd Hughes, Wayne Massop, Nick Neocleous, Dave Hornsby, Paul Ward, and around half a dozen less familiar names -- have formed a studio under the same name. They are working on the magazine, which is scheduled for August, but also some other outside projects. They won't give more information at present.

At this point I'd also mention that the guys from **Worlds Apart Studios** are some of the few who still attend the monthly comics gatherings held in London. We had to move the location from **CRACKERS** when the noise got too much, but have since been re-located at "The Frigate" in Great Newport Street, WC2. The event usually happens in the basement area, which is really comfortable and located near Leicester Square tube station. I would urge the lethargic masses living in or near London to get up off their asses and make an appointment with yourselves for the first Friday in each month. Any change of venue or other details will be posted on

the window of **DARK THEY WERE AND GOLDEN EYED**, if the circumstances arise.

DWELLERS TWO comes from Phoenix Publications

It costs 20p and showcases strips by Colin Stanford and the inspired Bob Watkins. It is all hidden behind a Nick Neocleous cover. **BIRTHDAY PRESENTS 2** is a rag I picked up at the London Comicon. I have never seen nor heard of the first issue, but

this one is so good I can barely wait to get it. Behind a very shoddy cover lies some produce from the Third Kind Studios. Just who they might be I don't know, but they deliver a strong visual adaptation of an 18-page story by Carl Bateman.

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I reviewed **SANCTUARY** in Bem-25. The same publishers have now brought out a special half-issue, which is available from 15, Queen Street, Kidsgrove, Stoke-on-Trent, ST7 4AH. It is a cute thing for collectors only I imagine; 30p should cover the cost.

Alex Dave Riddett is an artist who works on Bristol's alternative paper, **MAGIC VOICE**. The magazine has just released **MAGIC VOICE COMICS** with his work inside, and it's a reasonable effort. It costs 25p

F Art's **PICTURE BOOK OF MUSIC** was drawn by students of Bryan Talbot. Neither Bryan nor his cohort Bonk are included, but there is some interesting material to be seen inside. I have no price or address, so you will have to watch the specialist stores.

Bryan Talbot himself is one of the many stars in **NEAR MYTHS 4**. This magazine is a vast improvement on the first 3 issues, and Bryan's now taken over the editorship too. No doubt the changes will continue,

and issue 5 is scheduled for sometime this spring. You can also find Bryan's work regularly in **HOME GROWN** and **AD ASTRA** -- both currently at issue 6, and on sale in good newsagents.

Borin Van Loon has finally brought out his **INTELLECTUAL BULL COMIX**, which is published by Suburban Books,

It costs 35p, and the publishers also have a few of Borin's **URBAN PARANOIA** left which they are selling off at 30p each. The newest book is full of inspired surreal imagery in a continuing narrative format. Lovely stuff.

Borin and Bryan Talbot are among the many comic artists working on the new **ROCK ART** print series. Others include Stuart Briers, Hunt Emerson, Alan Craddock, Angus McKie, David Hine, Brett Ewins, and Garry Leach -- all of whom are known in the alternative comix field. New and forthcoming works for the project feature such names as Tim Buxell, Neal Adams, Howard Chaykin and Jim Starlin from America, plus Brendan McCarthy, John Bolton and others from Britain. The prints cost 95p each and are published by Communication Vectors, 10, Barley Mow Passage, London W4 4PH. 50p will bring you two full-colour catalogues by return of post. All these prints are limited editions of 5000, and many of them will never see reprinting in this or any form. Act now before it is too late.

All the prints are issued on a special textured paper stock, reproduced with the highest quality inks and colour-separated with laser-scanning techniques. As a special offer to Bem readers, I have arranged for a pack of the ten current fantasy prints to be made available at the bargain price of £4.95, post inclusive. The offer will only last until April 1st, so if you like the idea, rush your order to the address above, quoting Bem-27.

It seems crazy, but I have not yet reviewed **EITHER OR COMICS 2**, which comes from the Junior Print Group. For a mere 60p, you get a 48-page comic with a 4-page colour insert and colour cover by Angus McKie. Most of the book is McKie's, with some older, undiscovered classics showcased. Support artists include the very talented Alan Craddock and Dave Huxley. From Media & Graphic Creations

Issues 4 to 9 in the **AR:ZAK MICROCOMIXS** series are now available, and feature some groovy drawings by the likes of Pockets, Bonk, Hunt Emerson, Mike Matthews, Neil Hissum, and Mike Weller. They cost 10p each from the Arts Lab Press,

and £1 should get you the set post inclusive. A quick point I keep meaning to mention -- when sending off for these publications, please help the publishers out by remembering to add on postage & packaging costs, unless I have stated otherwise. These are usually around 18p on one item alone.

DARK STAR is a music magazine, published bi-monthly. I plug it here because it contains some interesting features on comics and other fantasy media. In particular, it runs another version of the column I am writing now. Readers who enjoy this version may wish to look up the other one on alternating months. My own magazine **GRAPHIXUS** has now suspended publication, due to overbearing financial problems. When all the outstanding affairs are settled, we do plan to bring you a final issue -- but our most conservative estimate for this is Summer 1981. The final issue will round off all the stories and other outstanding work, maybe in book format.

Nevertheless, there are rumours, and even positive noises, about new comix publications in this country. On these, I will bring you more news as soon as it is available.

-MAL BURNS

Bob Smart and Graham Holt
present

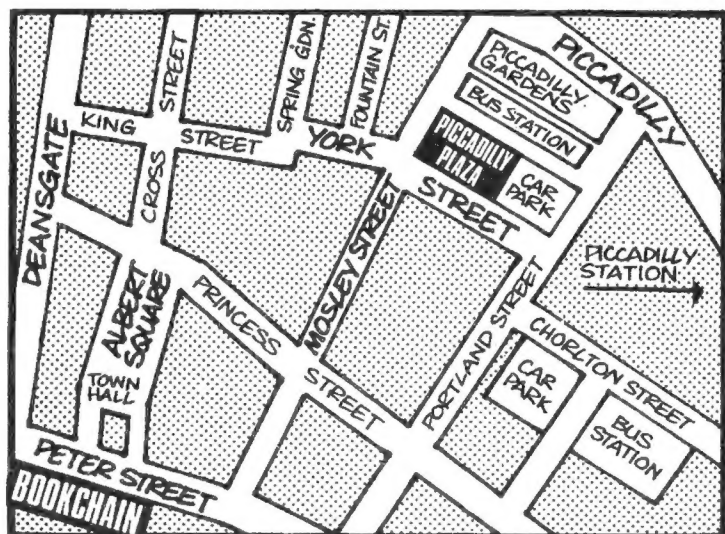
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An interview with Rick Marschall, former editor for various newspaper syndicates in the United States, and most recently celebrated in comic fan news circles because he is no longer an editor at Marvel Comics... ...conducted by Howard Leroy Davis.

Of Magazines And Movie Adaptations

RM: You'll probably have a question about this. There was a point at Marvel about 3 months ago when in one of my conferences with Shooter he said something to me which made me feel that it was impossible for me to work at Marvel any more... I mean I just couldn't see me going back and working another day after what he said to me. HLD: What?

RM: He said, "You're fired!"

HLD: And now that you're not working for Marvel, what are you doing?

RM: I'm doing a bunch of things. I'm working on a couple of books: one with Bob and Ray, the comedians, it's called "Bob and Ray's Cast of Thousands"... it's a who's who of all their nutty characters. The other book is about S.J. Perelman, who started out as a cartoonist... this is a collection of his early published work. And I've been turning down some job offers from other publishers and ad agencies. Also I'm working for a couple of European publishers: I'm doing some writing for a Scandinavian publisher, and finding some artists for an Italian publisher. It's not work in the fanzine spotlight as much as before, but I'm keeping busy.

HLD: The "fanzine spotlight" is a very fickle thing. I read how Don Glut, after doing some very fine work for Gold Key, found that nobody at a West Coast con cared -- but after working for Marvel, he was celebrated. Well, "celebrated" is a little strong... writers are seldom celebrated by fans for anything...

Back to the firing for a minute: did you see the handwriting on the wall at all?

RM: No, I didn't. I never got along well with Shooter. I don't think anyone does, basically... But the reason it was a surprise was that the magazine line was doing well. The 3-part Weirldworld Super Special series was breaking sales records, Moon Knight was taking off, The Hulk! sales were up. Really everything we were doing was up... sales, interest in licensing, merchandising... foreign sales especially. It sounds a little self-serving for me to say... but... it was the general opinion in that New York Times article and elsewhere that because the stuff was doing well, I'm no longer at Marvel.

HLD: Do you see it as a possible personality conflict then --- as opposed to a professional conflict?

RM: Oh, sure, sure... That was it.

Stu Reisbord (a Philadelphia area art dealer): I got the word from Marvel...

HLD: What word, Stu?

SR: It seems that Rick one night snuck into the Marvel office... and changed the price tag on the Star Trek Super Special from \$2.00 to \$1.50, thereby causing Marvel to lose \$50,000... And since he was in full charge of being able to change, raise and lower prices and so forth... that if he would have made the price \$2.50 he would have kept his job. But since he lowered it to \$1.50, they decided that they couldn't stand having him around any more.

RM: It's an interesting story... that did happen...

HLD: Oh, it did happen?!

RM: No, I didn't sneak into the Marvel offices at night -- an interesting story, though. Would you believe that DC paid me well to do it? It is an example of how

Marvel has changed in the last six months or so that's worth noting.

There was a mistake on the cover, and the Star Trek book has my name on it... but I had practically nothing to do with it. The cover went through 3 weeks to a month after I left, and it was supposed to be \$2.00... all the other Super Specials are \$1.50... and somehow the 6 or 7 people who see the covers didn't notice that this one wasn't the intended \$2.00, but \$1.50 instead. And, if it sells as anticipated, Marvel stands to lose fifty to sixty thousand dollars. So Shooter says, "Marschall did it. I don't care if he never saw the cover... It's his fault." Well, that's absurd -- but I think it's poetic justice, because there was no reason for the book to be \$2.00.

I was in on the early planning of it. It has no more pages than an ordinary Super Special. It was cheaper to produce because it was done with the lousy colour. The theory simply was that there wouldn't be a kid who would refuse to buy it at \$2.00. They believe that all the Trekkies are nutty, anyway. So it was just a very cynical thing -- Marvel was just soaking the fans.

HLD: Wait a minute. So when we say that Marvel "lost" that money, that's not really correct. We should say that they did not profit to the extent that they expected.

RM: They won't realize what they projected.

HLD: In other words, they're going to make a profit anyway, but not as great a profit. I thought from the way it was stated that Marvel had to pay so much for the comic rights to Star Trek that they were really going to lose money.

RM: No.

SR: Would you like to talk about the early distribution suit that they're afraid of?

RM: ((Chuckles))

HLD: We're willing to talk about anything -- what's an "early distribution suit"?

SR: I picked an early copy of Star Trek from the newsstand.

HLD: Right, that's where I got mine.

SR: I called up a young lady who wrote an article in it, and told her it looked very nice in print. She thanked me, and then said, "How did you see the article? The magazine's not to be sold for another month!" I said "they're selling it all over."

Since then I've had calls for the artwork from the Midwest. They had seen the magazine, and wanted pages... It seems that the whole press run went out a month early despite a contract with -- who is it? RM: Paramount.

SR: Paramount... that it was not to be distributed until the day the movie was to be released --

RM: The contract was very strict about that.

SR: --but it was distributed a month early... and Marvel was scared to death that they would lose everything by suit.

HLD: We had our family copy 2 weeks ahead of the movie. I put it aside so as not to read it, but my son dug it out and read it. And so he now says, "OK, that was enough..." Now he's not so sure he wants to see the movie! Of course, that's exactly what Paramount's worried about.



RM: Sure they are. And it's a legitimate concern. The contract is really explicit about that -- but someone along the line goofed up. So 400,000 copies -- it's a larger press run than usual -- went out and flooded the country. When they realized their mistake they wrote to all the distributors, wholesalers, and comics shops saying, "Oh, by the way, you have them, but please don't put them out until December 7th." You know who's going to abide by that...

HLD: Knowing how distributors work, it's a wonder they follow any directions. In fact, I don't think they can read!

Unknown Voice: Didn't you have trouble with the Battlestar Galactica book also?

RM: Yes; that's a different problem, however. Every studio property... every movie adaptation... Battlestar, Jaws II, Close Encounters... not so much with Star Trek, fortunately... the studios make so many problems that it's hardly worth it for the company to do it. But the executives see only the balance of credits; they don't have to put up with the editorial headaches. With Galactica, the thing was three editorial changes in the interview -- very minor, if you compare them with the unfixed ones that get out. It's really stupid, but they felt that they just had to assert their rights.

Unknown Voice: Actually, weren't there 3 miniature and 2 oversized editions of Galactica?

RM: There was the paperback, the treasury, and the Super Special. So there were 3 editions in addition to the regular 40 cent comics. Most of the Super Specials were shredded.

HLD: So none of the Super Specials were supposed to get out?

RM: Yes, that's right. But Marvel thought they'd salvage something. So they decided to get around the Studio by distributing them in the Midwest... keep them away from New York and Hollywood, where the Studio executives were likely to see them. It's really a sleazy business! And we're touching only on the sleazy peaks, I think there's a verdant valley that's worth talking about. Marvel's been changing significantly in the past few months...

Continued next issue, with Rick Marschall on "THE TOYMAKER SYNDROME" ... excerpted from an interview conducted at Christmas Con '79 in Philadelphia, on December 15th 1979. Transcribed by Howard Leroy Davis.



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